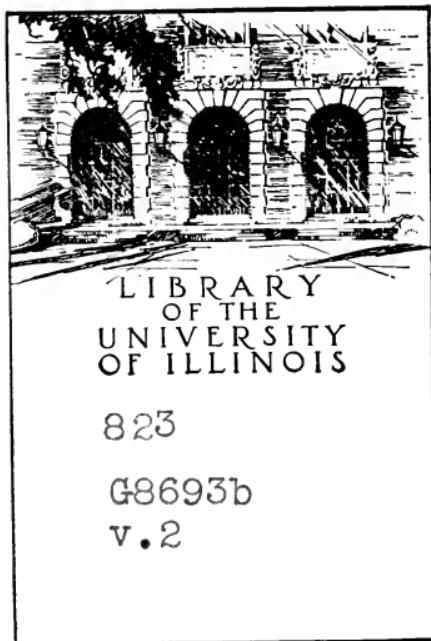




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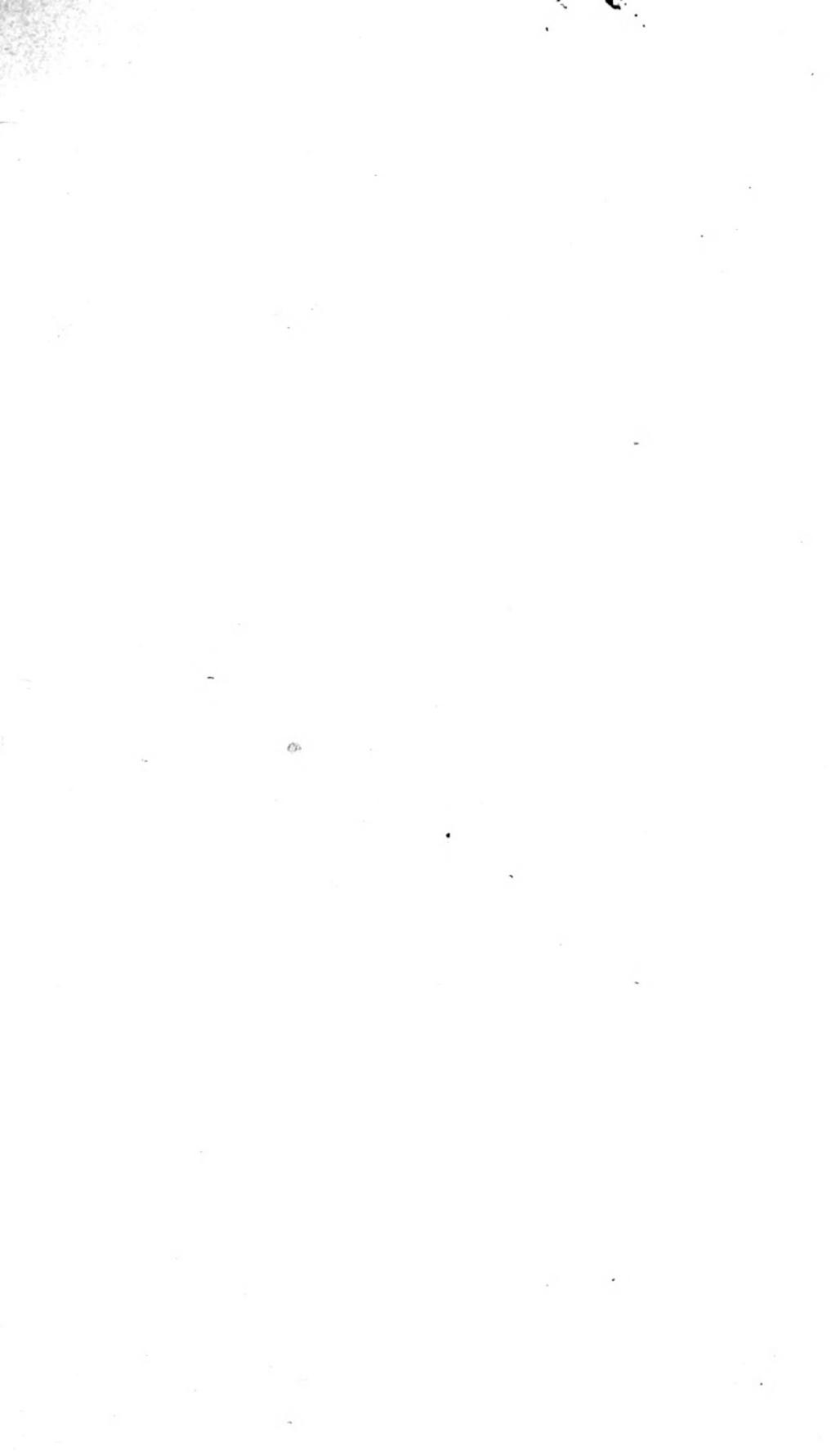


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THE
BOSOM FRIEND.
A NOVEL.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
“THE GAMBLER’S WIFE,” “THE YOUNG PRIMA DONNA,”
&c., &c., &c.

“A bosom serpent—a domestic evil!”

POPE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
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THE
BOSOM FRIEND.

CHAPTER I.

“ Ah, that deceit should steal such gentle shapes,
And with a visor vision hide deep vice.”

SHAKSPERE.

THE family were assembled in the drawing-room in Portman Square, when the young Italian girl was announced, and made her reverence to the party with her usual modest grace.

There are few, at least of novices in society, who, on entering a room filled with comparative strangers, do not feel some degree of that embarrassment, which, in the most bashful, confuses the vision and prevents them for the first few moments from distinguishing severally the persons and objects around. Few there are who possess sufficient presence of mind, to enable them to exercise that keenness of perception, Phrenologists class under the head of individuality—that is to say, the power of being able at one *coup d'œil* to take in collectively, and individually, every object around. But the faculty was highly developed in Nice—in one glance, ere humbly curtseying she bent her eyes to the ground, not only every person, but their exact positions, and the expression even of their countenances were distinctly observed.

There sat Mrs. Hamilton with her scrutinising glance turned quickly upon her, ere she rose to greet the new comer---the daugh-

ters talking and laughing with their father, Lord Beverley standing near Mrs. Hamilton leaning against the mantel-piece, with a careless but somewhat graver expression than was his wont ; and Giulia—not the Giulia with the clouded, absent countenance, which had characterized her demeanour from her earliest youth—but Giulia serene and happy—her arm encircling little Georgie's waist, her eyes bent down smilingly upon him, as he leant confidingly against her playing with her watch. But she was listening to another who sat by her side, passing his fingers through his little brother's curling locks.

It is unnecessary to say that this was Claud Hamilton. Just before Nice's arrival, Giulia had been speaking of her friend with great affection, and Claud Hamilton was one of those who found enjoyment in giving gratification to others ; to please Giulia therefore, he greeted the young Italian with all the frank warmth of manner by which he had

been distinguished of old, and dinner being at that moment announced, he gave her his arm, and whilst the repast lasted, paid her all the attention, which his kind heart prompted him to shew to the companion of his boyish days, not only on her own account—but for the gratification of Giulia, who seemed to understand his motive, and to be grateful for it.

And Nice perceived and understood all this, and still more. She saw that Mrs. Hamilton was labouring under excitement and anxiety, with a two fold aim in view. She had discovered one of the schemes, in the single visit she had before made in Portman Square, when to Mrs. Hamilton's evident displeasure, and notwithstanding all her graceful manœuvres to attract him to the pretty Gertrude's side, the fickle Lord had devoted himself with apparent absorption to her humble self—attentions which the wily girl perhaps might not have thought unworthy of being turned to some account, had it not been that with

the clear-sightedness in discerning designs, possessed usually by those not very single-minded themselves, she had fancied some motive to lurk in his conduct towards herself, and shrewdly guessed that she had been chosen by his Lordship as a convenient and safe subject, on which either to exercise himself in flirting, or for more serious reasons—perhaps as a means of extricating himself from his situation with regard to the Hamiltons, which certainly, if he had no serious intentions with regard to the daughters, was becoming an inconvenient position for him ; Lord Beverley however still continued to frequent the house, and people began to talk and wonder whether the fair Gertrude was ever to become Lady Beverley ; some even hinted that the fascinating mother was his attraction, and scandal, ever eager to lay hold of the greatest favourites of the world, neglected not to insinuate whispers, too ridiculous however to gain much credence, that his attention or affec-

tion, or whatever it might be called, was not unreturned, and that it was under cover of assiduity to the daughter, that Mrs. Hamilton carried on the flirtation. This absurd rumour having by chance reached Mr. Hamilton's ears, he, for his wife's amusement, repeated it to her.

“ Well, so far they are right,” she said after having laughed heartily at the communication, “ my admiration for Lord Beverley is certainly extreme—so extreme, that I *am* determined to make him my son-in-law. He shall not escape me I *am* resolved; I only wish he would be quick and make up his mind, or some one else will be pouncing upon Gertrude. To have allowed her to refuse one rich baronet for his sake is quite enough; any more such deeds would be tempting Providence.”

“ Well, dearest, I leave it all to you; I am quite sure you always know what you are about—but one question let me ask—are you certain of Gertrude’s feelings?”

“Feelings, my dear George; young ladies know much better how to marry now-a-days, than in our young times, when silly Annie Baillie refused a Marquis’s eldest son, to wed a certain George Hamilton —a younger brother! Be assured that Gertrude, with all her pretty, scornful ways, has much more sense than you give her credit for, and is ready to love more *wisely*, if not so *well* as her mother;” and Mrs. Hamilton’s eyes glistened though they smiled, as she lifted them affectionately to her husband’s face.

However, as time rolled on, Mrs. Hamilton began to be impatient, for matters did not proceed in the satisfactory manner she had at first anticipated. Gertrude, who at the commencement of the season had displayed no reluctance to the idea of the fulfilment of her mother’s plans, began to be aroused, and to shew that she had no inclination to be trifled with. Lord Beverley had flirted with the beautiful Italian girl, (though this bye the byc,

Mrs. Hamilton hoped might be pique) but worse than all, Claud seemed inclined to examine into the state of affairs; and should the investigation not prove satisfactory to his sensitive feelings, Mrs. Hamilton dreaded lest the whole business might be marred by any premature steps, taken by her less worldly, but strictly honorable son, whose feelings, where his sisters were concerned, were anxious and tenacious in the extreme.

This was one of the sources of uneasiness which the keen eyes of Nice discerned in Mrs. Hamilton. The crafty girl soon decided upon the part she was to act. She plainly saw that it was her interest to appear no stumbling block in her hostess's eyes; and if, ere this evening, her subtle perception had turned to the mighty suggestions of ambition, which the Earl's attentions might have engendered in her mind, what did it signify to her now, when the flame of passion which had been nursed in secret silence for years---stifled

though not extinguished---again seemed to blaze forth in full force in the presence of the recovered object of her love? Without an effort then she was able to set about her task of ingratiating herself in Mrs. Hamilton's opinion, by her modest and cold discouragement of any attention which this evening Lord Beverley might direct towards her. The other source of Mrs. Hamilton's solicitude was not less evident, and it excited in Nice's breast as much interest, as the other subject had been a matter of perfect indifference to her---this was the evident eagerness, veiled under an assumed carelessness, that Claud should devote himself as much as possible to Giulia. She noted the mother's countenance how it brightened, when she saw her son paying to the Baroness kindly attentions, the calm nature of which Nice perfectly understood, and which did not trouble her for a moment, although a fierce pang shot through her heart, when she

thought of what might be the result of a woman's manœuvres.

"Nice!" said Claud in the course of that evening, "have you heard of the important office to which I have been appointed?"

Nice half started---was he then again to leave the country?---but she commanded herself, and only lifted her eyes enquiringly to his face whilst he continued to talk.

"I have been boasting of my acquirements in the Spanish language, and my mother, determined, I suppose, to make me of some use, suggests my becoming family instructor. Lady de Crespigny has honoured me by consenting to become my pupil, and you really ought to give me this opportunity of paying my debt of gratitude for your instructions in Italian, by joining our class."

"You are very good," Nice answered humbly, "but—"

"Oh, we shall manage it," Claud continued, "so you may consider the plan fixed."

Giulia expressed pleasure at the arrangement, and Mrs. Hamilton smiled agreeably on the prospect, as the mutual desire of her son, and noble young guest; and before Nice departed, it was arranged that the Marchesa, whose consent must be propitiated, should be called upon the next day by some of the party, and talked into good humour and acquiescence.

“Lady de Crespigny is a great favourite with the Marchesa,” Nice insinuated, as a hint to Giulia that she relied on her being the one to arrange the business. It would never answer to allow any circumstance to interfere with the visits of the Baroness to Mivart’s Hotel---now more than ever necessary!

“Our friend Nice has become very handsome,” remarked Claud to Giulia, when she had departed.

As no one but Giulia gave any token of assent to this remark, he turned to his mother

and sisters, and asked if they did not admire her.

“A regular Italian face!” Mrs. Hamilton remarked evasively.

Annie confessed that she did not like her countenance, though her face certainly was very beautiful, and Gertrude, with a laugh, said she considered her very handsome, but begging Giulia’s pardon, there was something in the expression of her eyes, that always made her think of a glittering stiletto.

“And your forgiveness also I must crave Lord Beverley, for my remark,” she added.

“My forgiveness?” he said abruptly.

“Oh, yes! I see the stiletto eyes have pierced your heart. I wish you joy.”

“Thank you!” he answered coldly, his eyes at that moment being fixed absently on a little implement such as Gertrude spoke of, which happened to be in the hands of Annie—who sat quietly working—the sight of which had probably suggested the idea to her sister.

But as the eyes of the fair sempstress were suddenly lifted for a moment to his face, with a quiet, firm glance of grave rebuke, Lord Beverley, started as if, in reality, the little instrument had given him a wound. This glance of reproof was not for her own wrongs —those she had forgiven ; but in the careless cold words to her sister, she saw that towards her also, the same game would be repeated.

“ What have I said ? of what am I accused ? ” Lord Beverley exclaimed, rousing himself and turning to Gertrude.

“ Accused ? ” she replied with a curl of her pretty lip, “ it is your own conscience that must accuse you, for after all your admiration of the beautiful Nice is no great crime.”

“ Admiratioп, Miss Gertrude ; I am tired of only admiring—I admire no one now—I only love, when it is too late.”

The subject was becoming embarrassing to all parties. The two last sentences had been

uttered in a tone scarcely audible, as Lord Beverley stooped to raise something from the ground, yet they discovered on the usually fashionably composed countenance of the Earl, an expression which convinced his hearers, that what he had just uttered were not merely idle words. Gertrude laughed and changed the conversation.

CHAPTER II.

“ Love, fame, ambition, avarice—’tis the same,
Each idle—and all ill—and none the worst—
For all are meteors with a different name.”

CHILDE HAROLD.

THE Spanish lessons commenced. The Marchesa made no objection, when the Baroness, accompanied by one of the Miss Hamiltons, paid her a visit the following day, and made the request that Nice might be spared

for one hour every morning in order to study the Spanish language with the young party---so Nice was daily with the merry group of students. Any improvement, however, of the pupils might be attributed to the assiduity and quickness of the young scholars, rather than to the master's teaching—for in that art, Claud was no great adept—but then he declared that his sisters laughed at him, and treated him with no sort of respect; in short, there was more laughing and talking going forward than learning, in the study in Portman Square. Giulia alone, serious in her desire to learn the language, remonstrated. Mrs. Hamilton laughingly proposed that she should take a private lesson, and Claud declared that he was quite willing to give up his insubordinate pupils, and thus shew that it was their fault not his, that he did not make the most skilful instructor in the world.

Giulia at first hesitated, and seemed to

draw back, but at last consented to the arrangement, pleading for Nice to be also admitted to the lesson.

“Oh, certainly, I have no objection—no fault to find with her as a pupil, except that—I do not half like her—and never did,” he concluded, as Giulia, being suddenly called away, left the room.

“I don’t know what it is—she is beautiful—but there is something in that Italian girl’s eyes!”

“What they call the *mal occhio* of Italy, I should think,” said Gertrude, who seemed, certainly to have no great partiality for Nice.

However, so matters were arranged -- and a very different lesson the next proved — very different in its effects and purposes, at least, to the pupils. The handsome young tutor pursued his single-hearted object of obliging the friend of his early years — glad to be able to gratify her taste for languages,

in a manner he thought more agreeable to her, than had she taken lessons of a regular hired master, and he took good-natured pride and pleasure in her progress. He was, seemingly, perfectly unconscious either of the designs of one of his pupils upon himself, or the wounds he was inflicting on the heart of the other. In vain the thrilling, piercing glance—the insinuating smile, or artful sigh, the peculiar tone or meaning words! We do not pretend to insinuate, that a man like Claud, who had lived in the world---who was not unacquainted with the nature of woman's wiles, did not see the flashing glances which darted from brilliant black eyes---but they fell harmless on his heart, for he was guarded from the fascinations of a beauty, in whose every gesture, passion was so strongly expressed, by an antipathy, which had ever existed in his mind towards the Italian girl.

And as little did Claud appear to comprehend the reason of the downcast eye, the

trembling voice, the changing cheek of the other pupil — still the lessons continued. To Giulia, struggling in vain against the weakness those moments of intimacy only served to increase, they soon became a purgatory, and she now saw that any attempt on her part to put a stop to them, displeased her friend, who possessed so entirely the knowledge of her secret, and knew so well how to construe her every action.

It had once been rather a relief to Giulia to feel that there was one in the world to whom she could pour forth the history of her cherished fancy ; but when, by slow degrees, after the first arrival of Claud, she began to experience---as if in retribution for her former vain imaginings--the reality of love, her shame and sorrow at her own weakness, was increased by the dread of its being discovered. Nice saw it all ; but far from pitying, only scorned her weak friend for the sufferings she endured.

Did she not love—yes, love, as the cold, dull heart could never love — yet she suffered not in the manner she did—she was not sad and depressed, but only the more fierce and excited !

Nice could as little understand the feelings of her friend—who weak as she might be, still possessed the softer feelings of a woman—as the strong resisting thistle, might be supposed to appreciate the shrinking of the sensitive plant, at the touch of a human hand.

“ Love—the flower which closes up for fear
When rude and selfish spirits breathe too near”

was not her’s.

It was Nice’s pleasure that these lessons should continue, and she therefore managed that it should be so—she was not afraid of Giulia’s standing in her way ; she looked upon her as one whom Claud could never love.

Emboldened by the experienced power of her attractions upon one victim, whom she had enthralled in a few days, she thought it would

require but time, and the greater exertion of her arts to subjugate the less excitable young Englishman. Absorbed in her own schemes and interest, she had become rather less energetic in those of her uncle, and in her endeavours to further the accomplishment of his purpose, when a report reached her ears.

It was the Marchese who informed her of it, with the utmost delight painted on his countenance. It was rumoured, he said, in the fashionable world, that Lady de Crespigny was likely to be persuaded to bestow herself upon her guardian's eldest son. It was a very likely story to have been circulated—still, though Nice smiled in scorn upon the supposition, there was something in it which displeased her, and moved her to take some more active step.

She wrote to her uncle, and informed him of the report that was afloat, and recommended his immediate presence in London. She knew well what influence he possessed

over every mind, and also that the remembrance of his visit had ever retained its impression upon the mind of the Baroness. She still turned pale at the mention of his name. This advantage must not be neglected, but be made the most of.

With very different feelings another had heard the rumour. With secret satisfaction it reached Mrs. Hamilton's ears—although she knew there was little or no truth in it—as to any share at least that Claud had in the affair; so, she smilingly assured those who ventured to question her on the subject---still she was far from satisfied as to the real state of affairs.

Mrs. Hamilton was certainly a pattern to all in her situation, as a woman who lives in the world of fashion---(only to such, let it be plainly understood!) All she did, was done with such delicacy, at the same time with such skill; there was no blundering attempt to press matters before the proper time, by the use of

bare-faced, or awkwardly concealed manœuvres. She let things go quietly on their own way, with merely a gentle touch now and then, to set them in a right direction, instead of the bold, palpable moves which too often send the actors entirely off the proper line.

The mother beheld her unconscious son, as long as these reports had not reached his ears, continue his kind brotherly attentions towards the Baroness ; riding---walking with her as with his sisters, and he would dance with her, or sit by her side in public.

The state of Giulia's feelings had not escaped Mrs. Hamilton's keen perceptions, and the discovery greatly encouraged her in her sanguine views. It was upon this she relied most, as a means by which to lead her son captive to her wishes---on this and his extreme affection for herself---she knew well that for her sake he had ever been ready to make any sacrifice.

But with Claud, she was aware that she

had to deal with one, who, like his father, was the very soul of honour and right feeling, to whom she must not breathe of worldly interest and consideration, if she wished not at once to scare him from this good fortune. She must not breath a word on those points, upon which she did not scruple to dilate, when speaking to her daughters ; for men, she said, were so provokingly tenacious—at least, those with whom she had to deal ! and truly, if there existed one, who seemed to have preserved unimpaired these principles of honour, which the world is wont so soon to tarnish, it was Mr. Hamilton.

His wife had never dared to whisper to him a hint of her present scheme. She knew that the slightest idea of design in this case would excite his disgust and displeasure.

If it were so with him—what would it be with the son, possessing as he did, all his father's opinions, or prejudices, for so Mrs. Hamilton called what in reality—although

she often found them inconvenient—she could not choose but admire. Therefore it was to no worldly point of her son's character that she could direct her aim ; rather must her energies be directed to the unselfish nature of his disposition, and the strength of her influence over his mind.

Matters however approached their crisis sooner than she had anticipated.

CHAPTER III.

“ A married life, to speak the best
Is all a lottery contest ;

* * * * *

’Tis an important point to know
There’s no perfection here below.

* * * * *

Man’s an old compound after all,
And ever has been since the fall.”

COTTON.

CLAUD HAMILTON had been at home some weeks, when one day he entered his mother’s dressing-room, and threw himself on a sofa by her side.

After a few moments of silence, he exclaimed,

“ Mother, I have been very much annoyed to-day !”

“ Indeed—how, dear Claud, what has happened ?” she enquired.

“ People are such fools,” he exclaimed impetuously, “ such idiots, and busy bodies ! I had heard before, that there was some foolish report about the Baroness and myself, but did not know that it was so generally believed.”

“ Georgie, dear, do not make such a noise,” said Mrs. Hamilton, turning to the child, who was playing in the room ; as a little feint to hide the manifestation of any too great interest in the subject thus suddenly broached.

“ But I did not know, Claud,” she continued, “ that it had gone so far, as—”

“ It is really very provoking,” interrupted

Claud Hamilton, speaking rapidly, “ that a man cannot be kind and attentive to a girl whom he has known from a child, without such ridiculous nonsense being circulated.”

These words grated somewhat unpleasantly on Mrs. Hamilton’s ears, but she said very calmly,

“ And what have you heard which has so excited you ?”

Claud then told his mother, that he had been congratulated upon his intended marriage, as if it had been considered a settled affair, particularly from the circumstance of Lady de Crespigny, not having appeared in public lately.

And true it was that Giulia’s sick heart, now become insupportably painful, had made her shun gaiety, and remain almost entirely at home.

“ Now really,” Claud continued, “ on my own account, I care not for this folly, but it

may reach Giulia's ears also, and then in what a very disagreeable position it would place us both, considering how we are situated; however, I took care flatly to contradict it, and begged, Lady—to spread about that I had done so; I also assured L—— how grateful I should feel, by his exerting himself in my favour, concerning this appointment, which was half promised to me—and he said he would do all he could."

"My dear Claud!" exclaimed his mother, in a tone marking how little she approved of the proceeding.

"Yes, dear mother," continued her son, imagining that it was dismay at the idea of losing him again so soon—"I consider it my duty; however reluctant I feel to the idea of being separated from you all again, after so long an absence, this is not a time to think of idling at home. In the critical state of public affairs, when my father may soon be out of office, with all the expenses attendant

on so large a family, it would indeed be a sin for me to neglect the means of attaining this lucrative situation, though it should take me to America for two years."

"America for two years!" What a blow to all Mrs. Hamilton's prospects for him!

She looked grave and thoughtful, as she sat meditating some bold stroke; the time having now arrived, when some decisive measure became imperative.

Claud endeavoured to change the subject, and to restore cheerfulness to the countenance of his fondly loved mother, over which, he never could endure for a moment, to see a cloud.

Mrs. Hamilton's determination was soon taken.

Remembering the fresh, guilelessness of her son's disposition—his openness and sincerity, she thought, that after all, the best policy, as well as the least trouble to herself, would

be, at once to be sincere and explicit—so the next moment she exclaimed—

“ My own dear Claud, I know of a scheme which would be so infinitely more agreeable and advantageous than this horrid appointment,” Mrs. Hamilton paused a moment, looking somewhat nervously, but smilingly into his face, whilst he waited all attention for her to continue. “ My dearest Claud—what is there to prevent your confirming the excellent plan, the world has so kindly chalked out for you, by wooing our young Baroness—winning her, I am sure would be no difficult task.”

Claud looked first enquiringly into his mother’s face, to ascertain whether or not she were speaking seriously, and then coloring, in a slightly offended and astonished tone, merely said,

“ My dear mother, what an absurd idea!” and turned away.

“ Why absurd, Claud ?” she answered,

“ what is there in it, in which to find fault ?”

Mrs. Hamilton was quite prepared for the arguments she knew her son would bring forward, and now, merely waited for an opportunity to combat them with her persuasive eloquence.

“ Dear mother,” the young man said, with a smile, at the quiet manner in which the last question had been spoken ; “ you talk as calmly as if you were merely proposing that I should ask the Baroness to dance, instead of requesting her to become my partner for life ; but you are only joking, mother dear--no, it won’t do.”

“ Claud, I am not joking,” she answered, earnestly ; “ this is not a sudden thought, I can assure you ; it has long floated upon my imagination, as one of my most delightful castles in the air—one, the realization of which, would make me the happiest woman in the world. I should, however, never have

dared to mention the subject, had I not of late began almost to suspect, that such a wish on my part, would not surprise or displease you very much."

"Mother, for mercy's sake, what do you mean? I am sure I have afforded you no cause for such a suspicion."

"Really, my dear boy, I cannot give you credit for possessing so small a share of the vanity inherent to your sex, as to imagine that you could have been perfectly blind to the glaring fact, of the state of the little Baroness's heart, which has been so sorely wounded by your *beaux yeux*—and when you have continued so remorselessly to deepen and widen the wound with such gentle cruelty — such kind attention — what is one to think?"

Claud coloured and looked deeply annoyed, though he tried to laugh, when, at the conclusion of the speech, he said,

“ What nonsense! I am sure you belie
Giulia cruelly.”

“ No, indeed, Claud, your sisters will tell
you the same story—they are as well aware
of the fact as I am—and, indeed, who could
help perceiving it? I never saw any one
look so truly miserable as poor Giulia has
done lately; she neither eats or sleep—and,
in short, is as perfect a specimen of

‘ She never told her love,
But let concealment, &c., &c.’

as I ever beheld.”

“ If this is true, mother, it was very
wrong indeed of you, not to warn me of it
before; God knows, I would rather have cut
off my right hand, then that this should have
happened. It is making me out, indeed a
brute, to imagine that, with the least suspi-
cion of such an idea, as you have just
suggested, I should not have acted very dif-
ferently. I have everhitherto, almost considered
Giulia in the light of a sister,” continued

Claud, pacing the room with agitated steps; “when a cold, dull child, I used to take pleasure in being kind to her, because she was neglected by others — and she is one, who I should never have suspected of susceptibility.”

“God knows, Claud! you must consider she is not your sister — nor is she a child — and remember, Etna lies beneath the snow.”

“You are Job’s comforter, mother — however, I do still hope that you are mistaken. I shall go down to Brighton for a few days,” he added, abruptly, after Mrs. Hamilton had suffered him to pace the room hurriedly for some minutes, in order that he might digest the new ideas she had introduced into his mind.

“Do think over this business, dear,” Mrs. Hamilton at length said, seriously and persuasively; “it is a matter which concerns us all so greatly; the happiness not of one, but

the welfare of so many is implicated in it — and, above all, yourself; although, I well know, that is the last person of whom you ever think."

"No, indeed, mother, this is not my intention; but rather to put a stop to this unpleasant business, before it goes any further -- for even if I do not get the appointment, Giulia will be soon returning to Shirley; and I cannot persuade myself there can be anything so very serious in her feelings towards me, but what will not soon evaporate — nothing to render it incumbent on me to make such a sacrifice of myself, as to —"

"Hush, hush! dear Claud," interrupted Mrs. Hamilton, feeling how disagreeable might be the remembrance of those words some future day; "do not so hastily reject all thoughts of a step, the vital importance of which, to yourself and family, you cannot at present imagine."

“Mother!” exclaimed the young man, much agitated, “it may be as well, perhaps, to come to the point at once—which will, I am sure, settle the matter finally, and shew you the impossibility of this scheme, on which you have—I am annoyed and grieved to see—so set your mind.”

Mrs. Hamilton looked alarmed.

“I do not love Giulia,” Claud continued; “and never, for any worldly consideration, would I be so base as to marry a woman I did not love. I know what you would say, mother,” — for he guessed pretty well, the arguments she would use upon the occasion; “however, I think I am quite young enough to be allowed to wait a little longer before it is necessary for me to marry at all; certainly, I feel no inclination to hurry myself into a *mariage de convenance*—the principles of which I condemn, as much as I should dislike the affair in itself. My dear mother, if we are to be thus bartered for worldly

considerations, what becomes of our advantage over royalty, in our freedom as regards the disposal of our hearts? I am sure, if we only glance at the present wretched state of affairs in Carlton House, we ought to be thankful, that love alone need influence us, fortunate subjects—in the choice of a partner for life; if the affections of the heart are to be set aside, and expediency and interest substituted in their place, then—”

“ But dearest Claud,” interrupted Mrs. Hamilton faintly, “ there is at least love on one side, and it would be different if you had ever conceived any other attachment;” and she looked with half timid enquiry into her son’s face.

“ Oh, you want to dive into my secrets,” Claud said laughingly; “ but you may set your mind at ease on that point, mother mine! My heart has never yet received any severe wounds—only very harmless injuries from the dark eyes of the Spanish ladies; but it is my

dream of joy, that some day I may meet with a fair one, as much like my beautiful mother as possible," and he kissed her affectionately, "one who I may be able to love, and who will return my love. Well Georgie, I hope," he continued rising as if the conversation were at an end, "I hope you are edified by my discourse;" for the child, having been obliged to cease his noisy game, had remained crossed legged on the sofa, beguiling the time by brandishing his whip, and listening most attentively to the dialogue going on between his mother and Claud.

A little play now followed between the brothers—and then Claud glanced at his mother; she sat silent—looking most unfeignedly dejected and crest fallen.

It may seem that Mrs. Hamilton had made less use of her powers of rhetoric and persuasion, than might have been expected from the ardent interest she felt in the cause; but the fact was, that the straightforward, undisguised

manner in which her son treated the proposal, seemed to put to shame the worldly feelings of the mother's heart. She looked upon her noble son, inwardly gloried in his generous sentiments, and the truth of all he said came home to her heart. It would indeed be a sacrifice, for one so young—so good—so noble—so truly formed for the heart's purest affections, for ever to shut up their source by the seal of a cold, calculating marriage.

Mrs. Hamilton felt this, and she lost all courage to bring forth the flash of eloquence and rhetoric, she had prepared; but at the same time, she felt only deeper disappointment and mortification at the sight of her darling vision melting into air—and at feeling that she herself was losing strength, though (alas! alas! for degenerate human nature) not inclination to support her scheme.

Mrs. Hamilton knew not at that moment how much more this passive resignation, (for which she deeply blamed herself) tended to the success

of her wishes, than would have done the most determined and skilful perseverance. If she had continued her worldly entreaties and arguments, Claud would have been perhaps only the more confirmed in his view of the matter. But he could not bear to witness the subdued and disappointed air of the mother whom he almost idolized—who had ever been his *beau ideal* of perfection in a woman.

Placing himself therefore again by her side as she sat—her eyes fixed on the ground, he said, taking her hand affectionately within his ;

“ Do not look so grave, dear mother; tell me what makes you so anxious about this most extraordinary plan ?”

Mrs. Hamilton lifted up her head, with a brightened expression.

“ Claud,” she exclaimed, “ I am sure you know your mother too well to think, that for her own selfish gratification alone, she would urge upon you anything against which your heart rebels; truly would every advantage it

affords be cancelled, if accompanied by repugnance on your part. My darling son, I only ask you not to be rash, not to reject without due consideration, a prospect, which one day you may repent having so precipitately, I may add, so weakly, disregarded. My dear boy, only view the subject in its proper light. Here is a young Baroness—no brilliant beauty I confess!—but at the same time no fright; and look round and tell me, where is the domestic happiness, solely depending on the possession of loveliness?—This young Peeress is talented, amiable, for I am certain that Giulia conceals, under a somewhat reserved deportment, intrinsic merit, which drawn forth by the happiness and affection of domestic life, are what any man might be proud of. Well then, amiable and clever we know she is, and above all---and this is the greatest recommendation in my eyes---she has the taste and heart to love with pure disinterestedness

my own dear son." Tears started to the mother's eyes, and were soon rolling down her cheeks.

Claud sat mute and motionless, and looked pale and agitated.

"Oh, Claud," Mrs. Hamilton continued, "you will be disappointed if in this cold and bitter world, you expect to find many instances of such a love---a love like hers—poor Giulia's! it is a rare and precious gem, reject not thus heedlessly, that which you may never find again. This is the state of the case, Claud; what has it to do with any private mercenary considerations on your part? and with regard to others—"

"But, mother, I love her not," groaned poor Claud.

"Not at this moment, perhaps," replied Mrs. Hamilton, "but you have never tried to do so; and," she continued in a voice of agitated earnestness, which had in it a slight shade of

reproach, “ it is all very well, dear Claud, to talk of feeling and inclination ; it would indeed be delightful if we could think alone of indulging every impulse, but we cannot unfortunately live entirely for ourselves—forget all interest—all happiness but our own. Claud, to come to the truth without further discussion, you know we are far from rich ; we live, in consequence of the position in society we are obliged to maintain, far above our income. Just now our circumstances are peculiarly difficult. Henry’s Sandhurst’s education -- Archie just gone to an expensive school—the governess—your elder sisters, who cost not a little just now, requiring as they do so much dress, &c., &c., during this London season. Perhaps you will say we ought to do less, but you know your father would rather starve himself, than see one of his children deprived of any advantage which might benefit them ; and God knows,” and her eyes filled with tears, “ this is not from any worldly

pride it springs from his indulgent, affectionate, unselfish heart. At this present time," Mrs. Hamilton continued, "I know he is much harassed by pressing money matters—you have remarked that you did not think your father was in particularly good spirits. I understand every shade of his countenance, every tone of his dear voice, and know, that under all his seeming cheerfulness when among us, he is far from himself. I almost fancy he looks ten years older within these last few weeks," and Mrs. Hamilton's countenance shewed plainly the genuine emotions, which even worldliness had never for a moment diminished—feelings of anxious devoted love for her husband !

Claud sat leaning his head upon his hands and was still silent.

" Dear Claud," his mother continued, in a voice of unfeigned emotion, " you must forgive me if I seem to overlook in the slightest degree your feelings, in pressing the consider-

ation of this affair upon you, but it is a stake of such vital importance, for not only is your own welfare, but the happiness and prosperity of so many concerned in it. Oh! what a relief would it be to your father's mind, to feel that you, at least, were well provided for—such a thing for you—for your sisters—indeed for all!"

Again she paused, and laid her soft hand caressingly on his. Claud lifted up his head, arose looking very grave and very pale, said it was time to dress, and spoke a few careless words to one of his sisters, who entered the room at that moment.

And this is not an exaggerated picture, of the manner in which many a marriage is arranged! Sad to say, it is an over true one. We fear that if there was, a behind the scenes, in nine cases out of ten, where a listener might hear the discussions which generally take

place before a marrige is settled, they would be convinced that we paint from life. Yes, it may be a melancholy idea, but so it is, that many an ardent and free young spirit is talked ---yes, literally talked into marriage—

Many a young creature whose hopes of happiness in the married state are high, who has panted for the joys of companionship with an idol of its fancy---all perfect---all delightful---has this dream of years, at once remorselessly overthrown—another's or father's hand destroying the beautiful fabric by some plan of prudence, and without a pang is the beautiful edifice demolished; for parents think only of the substance, and have outlived all remembrance of the shadow, which perhaps they once cherished also in their young and unworldly days. And there is always a weapon which parents can wield for the purpose desired—some tender chord to harp upon—if the victims are callous to their own interest, there is always a *corps de reserve*; some

touching of feelings—some relationship—some working upon the generous ductile heart of youth. All this is fact—not fiction. Marriages are oftener than people imagine---*marriages de convenance*---and instead of wondering that there are so many unhappy wedded pairs, the marvel in our opinion is, that there are so many happy ones. We speak not in reproof, but in sorrow, for the infirmity of human nature; for so it is with all alike, and so we know it will be, as long as the business continues, of marrying, and giving in marriage. After all, though there are very few marriages made in these our days, according to the dictates of nature, perhaps it is as well; for many of what are called *love matches*, are for the most part sorry concerns, generally turning out mixtures of poverty, disappointment—ofttimes, misery!

Claud Hamilton dined at Carlton House that evening. The Hamiltons were great favourites of the Regent. Almost immedi-

ately upon entering the Royal presence, he was startled by his august host addressing him, with that degree of interest in the affairs of others, which he so peculiarly possessed.

“ Well, Sir, when is it to be ? come, don’t deny it---never let such an opportunity slip---a capital stroke for you---I put it into your mother’s head the first night of your arrival ; I shall expect to hear before long that it is all settled—” and the Prince passed on.

Poor Claud ! he thought all the world had conspired against him--even he who was himself suffering annoyances and heartburnings, from his own sad specimen of a *mariage de convenance*.

CHAPTER IV.

" I would not pry into thy secret soul ;
But if these things be sooth, there still is time
For penitence and pity ; reconcile thee
With the true church, and through the church to Heaven."²⁷

BYRON'S MANFRED.

How happily unconscious was Giulia the next morning, when she heard that Claud was going to Brighton for a few days, that she was in any way connected with his departure, for he altered not his sudden determination to leave London.

She heard the intelligence unmoved ; her love was then of that hopeless, crushing kind, which renders the heart insensible either to pleasure or pain, in the presence or absence of its object.

But had she known all, what agony and shame would have been her portion ! As it was, even when Claud entered the drawing-room to take leave, she merely felt her heart beat quicker.

He had bid adieu to his sisters--to his mother, who had avoided another private interview with her son, and now, as he approached the Baroness, she turned away to avoid the appearance of observing him.

Claud advanced towards Giulia, and his feelings were most uncomfortable as he did so. He had not seen her since his conversation with his mother---he scarcely dared to look at her, or speak, lest his voice should appear changed---he put out his hand, with a hasty gaze at her countenance, and she gave hers

in silence too—it was cold, but trembled not in his grasp.

Her face was very pale, her expression of that fixed and joyless cast, which he had remarked of late, but considered only as the demonstration of the gloomy character of her childhood. But now the quiet, hopeless, dejection of her demeanour touched his heart; he viewed it under a new light.

There are few, if any, whose vanity (if not other feelings) is not somewhat pleasingly touched, by the idea of being loved; and though Claud possessed as little as possible of this predisposition--which begging their pardon, is generally more largely developed in his own sex, than in that of the other---we will not say that it was not a little gratified vanity, mingling with the milk of human kindness---with which his heart over-flowed---that caused it to soften, as the thought passed through his mind, that Giulia loved him, loved him too

with that unobtrusive, modest love, which could excite no repellent feeling in his breast, but rather fill it with gratitude---with pity!—*Pity!*—when a man begins to pity---truly he is not far from a warmer feeling.

Claud pressed her cold hand which returned not his pressure—a slight shade of colour alone demonstrating that she noticed it. But ah! she did indeed feel it, and felt as it were, the sun-beam of the glance which accompanied it.

“ But 'twas a gleam—a fairy gleam
Which soon had passed away,
Like that which on a wintry morn
Doth brighten all as May—
For one brief moment—then 'tis gone
And all seems still more drear—
So her poor dark, and lonely heart
More desolate did appear.”

Giulia paid her usual visit to Mivart's that day. She was shewn into the sitting room, where she generally held her confidential interviews with her friend, and where she had lately found the young Marchese, whose presence was

almost a relief, now that her mind was burdened with a feeling which she shrunk from having scrutinized, by the keen eyes even of her bosom friend. But this day the apartment was unoccupied on her entrance, even by Nice ---and she sat for some time alone in a state of dreamy stupor, into which—when the presence of others did not rouse her to some exertion---she now generally sank.

At length a sound met her ears---the closing of the door! She slowly lifted up her eyes. They wandered at first with a sort of bewildered expression, over the dark figure of a man, who stood before her, whilst a voice stern, though musical, murmured over her a blessing.

It was Fra Paolo.

Giulia arose, a kind of mysterious awe stealing into her breast, as his identity darted upon her perception.

The Priest fixed his penetrating glance upon her, and after a moment's silence he spoke—

“Lady de Crespigny, I rejoice to see once more, her for whose soul’s welfare I have wept—and prayed—and chastened myself with fasting and penance. May I find that my prayers and stripes have not been unavailing; that the craftiness of man, and the art with which they lie in wait to deceive weak mortals, has not been permitted to prevail against you; but that the saints and Holy Virgin watching over my daughter, have preserved safe to her, the treasure of her departed mother’s faith---the only true faith by which she can be saved. Though its profession may have been hidden in the heart, from the eyes of those, who would fain wrest it from you; yet I pray that it is still there---uncorrupted---and ready to be shewn forth boldly---when the truth and honour of our Holy Mother Church requires it. Daughter, is it so?” and he fixed a stern penetrating glance upon the pale countenance of Giulia.

Religion can assume no very strong and

palpable form in a mind distempered or ill-regulated. The heart, after vain shadows,

“Disquieting itself in vain,”

starts aloof from that pure, calm voice, which offers to the earthly mind, no

“Fairy gleam—no rapture high!”

In Giulia’s case, the influence which the subtle Priest, in his visit to Shirley had acquired over her mind, had never entirely lost its power; nor associated with him, the impression of a religion which he had presented in so imposing and exciting a manner to her young imagination.

Still this had been much confused with the purity and truth of the doctrines with which her aunt had subsequently striven to imbue her mind; but the fact of living, as she had done

latterly so much with the world, and the people of the world, had dimmed more than ever, the ideas of truth in her mind, and weakened its power over her heart.

Sometimes, when her soul yearned with an undefined longing for that peace which the world cannot give, the gracious words.

“Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden,” sounded in her ear ; and her spirit, as it were, struggled to fly to Him, who called it with such gracious words.

But there was not faith to lead her spiritual eyes to discern, *who* would have given her rest, and she would then strive to prostrate herself in imagination before the golden crucifix, and the pictured form of the meek Virgin--as once before she had knelt in her mother’s chamber.

But from these images her heart ascended

not to Him, to whom the worshippers of idols profess to lead their followers ; it rather descended to the creature with which these emblems were associated ; and with a mysterious awe, how different to the feeling with which the meek disciple of Christ strives to inspire those he would lead to his master's love, Giulia would remember the solemn mien of the priest, all the solemnity and mystery with which the thoughts of that dark man were connected ; and she would lose sight of the Creator in the idea of the proud, usurping *creature*.

And now he stood once more before her, in all the saintly dignity of deportment he could so well assume ; so particularly striking to one, living as she had done, so long amongst the light and earthly-minded---amongst those to whom outward sanctity was unknown---crushed, burdened as she had felt before with a sorrow from which, she could not seek

relief, through the pity or sympathy of her equals. Pride seemed to vanish before the surprise---the awe of his superior presence ; --- she sunk on her knees at his feet murmuring,

“ Father, I know not, I know nothing, but that I am weak, and sinful, and miserable --- weary of the world, of myself. Oh ! give me ---give me peace !”

A smile illumined the countenance of the priest; not the smile, alas ! with which angels cheer the worn soul, who

“ Faint with its short flights and flutterings,
Would seek a refuge in its parent breast.”

but the smile of one who sees before him, weak, irresolute—smarting under the stings of vexation and disappointment, a ready victim to human influence and power.

The priest took a crucifix from his breast, and pressed it to her lips.

“Here---here, there is peace!” he murmured, “on this, my daughter, fix your gaze, whilst in humble penitence, you pour forth your sins and weaknesses before me. I will absolve you from their guilt. Only believe, and peace will enter your soul.”

Giulia paused. Alas! it was but earthly feelings which prompted her hesitation, ere she thus acknowledged herself separate from that faith, which receives remission of sins from God alone.

Was she to be separated from the communion of him she loved---was she to declare herself one of that religion, of which he had professed his abhorrence?

“Father,” she faltered, “forgive me---not now!”

Fra Paolo did not press the point, but raising her from the ground, led her to a seat---and Nice, at that moment, entered with the

—

humble deportment---which, of late, she had somewhat laid aside--and seated herself by Giulia's side.

The agitation of this interview, had, as it were, burst the bands which had confined her pent up feelings, and a torrent of tears relieved her over-charged heart--under whose softening influence, her heart lent itself passively to the power which the priest failed not to exert, to enthrall her unstable soul.

Before the departure of the Baroness, the young Marchese, under the commanding sway of Fra Paolo's orders, entered the room with a sullen, downcast air.

The priest took Giulia's hand, and placing it within that of the young man, said in a solemn tone,

“ My children, on your united efforts in her service, the Holy Mother Church has built many hopes. I exhort you to love one another.”

Giulia, unconscious of his real meaning,

only looked some surprise ; but the young man gave a slight shudder. It did not escape the priest's quick eye, who gave him a stern, penetrating gaze.

Giulia departed with the chain of another power fastened to her mind ; which, as day by day successively for the next week, she repeated her interviews with the priest, coiled more and more around her morbid imagination. The power of love and priestcraft, were both contending for mastery. Never was a mind in such a state of perplexity as poor Giulia's. But a crisis was at hand.

The weak body cannot long sustain unmoved the tumult of the mind within it. Just when Giulia was beginning to gaze round in affright, for rescue from the power and intellectual superiority of the tempter, and the priest's startling designs had been gradually revealed to her perception—of which, she was to be the implement---when she saw herself called upon to decide on that, from which her

heart shrunk with loathing, illness came to her relief, and she sunk languid and exhausted on a bed of suffering, entirely brought on by nervous excitement.

CHAPTER V.

“ Now, I see
The mystery of your loneliness, and find
Your salt tears head. + + +
* * * *
+ + Then, I confess,
Here on my knee, before high heaven and you,
That before you, and next unto high heaven,
I love your son. * + * * *
ALL'S WELL THAT END'S WELL.

IN the meantime, Mrs. Hamilton had not failed to do all in her power to keep alive in her son's mind, during his absence, the impressions--with which she hoped he had departed--by writing fre-

quently---a channel of communication, she deemed, perhaps, even more favorable to such a purpose, than any further attempts at personal influence to forward the case---for she could pour forth on paper, pathetic appeals to his affectionate heart, and trust to the softening power which absence ever possesses, to heighten and enhance their effect upon a son, as devoted as was Claud Hamilton.

His mother, dwelt too--and she could do so with truth--on the increasing inroads which her unfortunate attachment was effecting upon Giulia's health and spirits, and she now wrote to say, that the poor, dear girl, was absolutely confined to her bed by an attack of nervous debility. It must be allowed, that it was with something like triumph at her heart, that she made the communication; and, whilst with the care and tenderness of a mother, she nursed the invalid, she could scarcely regret an indisposition which might tend, not only as an assistance in the fulfilment of her own wishes, but

afford an effectual cure to the malady which was consuming the energies of her young friend.

Claud Hamilton also wrote to his mother, but briefly ; he but once touched upon the matter so interesting to her, and that was in a manner rather puzzling and incomprehensible.

“ There is no occasion, dear mother,” he said, “ to dwell so much upon this subject. I think it was sufficiently discussed in our interview before my departure ; for the present, spare your pretty fingers all the trouble you give them concerning it.”

The letter received, after he had heard of Giulia’s illness, was addressed to Annie. Many kind expressions of regret were expressed in it, and almost affectionate messages to the poor sufferer. It also contained an intimation of his having fixed his return for the Friday following.

“ Do not however let me disturb Seymour,”

he added, alluding to a young Clergyman, a friend, who was occupying his apartment during his absence. "I can easily get a room at an hotel, and it would be a pity to put him to the expense of going into lodgings."

Mrs. Hamilton took the letter, and went with it to Giulia's bed-side. She held another in her hand---it was from Mrs. Gordon.

When burdened by sorrow or depression, and all seems dark around us, we oftentimes feel a longing desire for the presence of those who are not of this world. The worldly may be as outwardly kind and affectionate in their sympathy and efforts to soothe, but the diseased heart requires the aid of one, who is the disciple of Him, "who beareth our sicknesses, and healeth our infirmities." And thus when Giulia's friends pressed around her during her illness, her thoughts turned yearningly to the gentle being, whose maternal tenderness she had never sufficiently prized when it was offered, nor heeded her counsels; which, had

she followed, might have strengthened her mind, and the misery and weakness from which she now suffered, have been thence avoided.

“Aunt Gordon—dear aunt Gordon!” was the exclamation, which now faintly escaped her lips.

Her kind guardian happened to be in the room, when it was uttered. Mrs. Hamilton had hinted to him her suspicions of the cause of Giulia’s illness, as a preparation for what she hoped would follow, and although it was rather difficult to make him understand such excessive susceptibility in one he had always considered as not of the melting order, the knowledge of her feelings added greatly to the kind anxiety with which he proceeded to make a hasty visit to his ward, before leaving the house for the business of the day; and on hearing these words sighed forth he said, soothingly,

“Well, dear Giulia, we will send for Mrs.

Gordon to see you, a little trip will do her good."

Before he went abroad that morning, Mr. Hamilton accordingly wrote a few lines, informing the aunt of her niece's illness, and urging her to pay them a visit. Mrs. Hamilton made no objection to this plan, but at the same time felt that the unworldly, single-mindedness of the good lady would be rather *mal à propos* just then, when plots and intrigues were thickening around.

But in her hand she held the answer.

"I have brought you some most agreeable medicine, Giulia," Mrs. Hamilton exclaimed with a cheerful voice, as she stood all smiles by the bed-side. "Here is a letter from your aunt; she will be here to-day."

"To-day?" Giulia exclaimed with some eagerness.

"Yes, and not only your aunt; she proposes bringing with her your dear little

sister Francesca ; she requires a visit to the dentist, or some such pleasant thing ; and your good aunt, who has till now been so jealous of allowing our London smoke to breathe upon this beautiful flower, of whom we have heard so much, and who we are all so dying to see, has at length made up her mind to expose her to its pollution for the sake of her pretty teeth. Are you not delighted, dear Giulia ? And Claud, he will be back on Friday ; how glad he will be to see the little thing ! ”

Giulia’s brow contracted with a movement as if of pain. After a slight pause she murmured---

“ I think it is hardly worth while bringing her so long a journey, for I—I must return to Shirley Hall in a very few days—indeed as soon as my aunt has rested after her journey.”

“ Leave us, dear Giulia ? Oh, no indeed, we cannot allow that---but here, I have another

letter, with something in it for you," and Mrs. Hamilton read to Giulia those parts of Claud's epistle relating to herself. An hysterical sob from the young girl as she lay, her face buried in the pillow, was her only comment.

Mrs. Hamilton took the cold hand which was convulsively pressing the coverlet, in the endeavour to restrain her emotion.

" You will not go and leave us, Giulia," she said again.

" Oh yes---oh yes," was the gasping reply.

" No, Giulia, my own dear daughter; Claud will never allow that just now."

" Daughter! Claud!"

Giulia sprang up, and gazed wildly around on Mrs. Hamilton.

" What, what," she faltered, " do you mean?" and then covered with confusion, as if fearful of having betrayed her secret, she buried her face in her hands and sobbed out,

" Leave me, leave me."

“ No, dearest Giulia, do not send me from you, nor seek to hide from me, that which only makes me love and admire you, and causes me, for Claud’s sake, to rejoice. Why be ashamed of a feeling so pure and beautiful? Why should you not love Claud, when he loves you?”

“ Loves me,” Giulia murmured, “ oh no!”

“ Yes, my love; why should there be any longer concealment between us? It is for me to be the interpreter of my son’s feelings towards you, and for his sake, and mine, if not for your own, I must implore you, dear Giulia, not, from the impulse of any false pride, to dash for ever the dear hopes I have formed for him. Forgive me, Giulia, I would not have presumed to speak thus openly on a subject so delicate, had I not dared to hope, that not only my son’s interest but your own happiness was also implicated.” Pride! oh her heart was too softened for pride—too weak to

spurn as flattering and illusive words which came to her ear,

“ Like the sweet south
That breathes upon a bed of violets,
Stealing and giving odour,”

suffusing hope!--and hope alone was bliss to her desponding heart. She fell upon Mrs. Hamilton's bosom, and weeping soft relieving tears, tacitly consented to the reception of the truth of all that she had said—whilst Mrs. Hamilton, feeling now that she had indeed gone too far to stop short, continued to pour into Giulia's delighted ear, words which made the dark world seem to pass away, and a Paradise of brightness to open before her eyes. She heard that even her union with the idol of her heart, had not been unthought of—that it had been spoken of by him. She heard of his sentiments and scruples upon the subject of a marriage, which might in the eyes of the world seem mercenary—his horror of such an idea !

She heard all that could give her hope, and fill her heart with new and delightful thoughts.— She remembered she had the power not only of conferring domestic happiness, but worldly benefits on him she loved so well, bestowing all she possessed so freely and joyfully upon him. She heard all, every little detail into which Mrs. Hamilton could diffuse a shade of truth, to make up for the false gilding with which her communications were forced to be surrounded, she heard all but the words—

“Mother, I love her not!”

But in the midst of this bliss, a somewhat startling interruption took place. Mrs. Hamilton had for some time been scanning anxiously an object which had caught her quick eye---it was a small crucifix suspended round Giulia's neck and which, in her agitation, she had allowed to escape from her bosom. By degrees, unpleasant suspicions had begun to suggest themselves to her mind, which at length broke forth into the exclamation of---

“ My dear Giulia, tell me, why do you wear that crucifix ?”

Giulia started violently, and grew dreadfully pale.

“ You have no leaning towards Roman Catholicism I hope, my dear child,” she continued seriously, “ I trust not indeed ; that would be a downfal to all our happiness. I have often heard Claud declare that he would never marry one who differed in religion from himself, and against the Roman Catholic faith, he has a decided prejudice. Tell me Giulia, that my suspicions are unwarrantable ; I trust you have not allowed your Italian friend, in any way to tamper with your religious feelings, for if that be the case—”

“ Oh, no, no !” interrupted the Baroness “ I will tell you all, dear Mrs. Hamilton.” And to one who held as it were, the key of her most treasured secret, it required little effort to draw from the agitated girl, the whole history of the priestly influence, under which she had

lately been existing. Mrs. Hamilton was shocked and disgusted by the detail of this crafty plot, but Giulia's shame and agitation restrained in a measure her expressions of indignation, and she acceded to her ardent prayer, that the affair might be kept secret —divulged to no other ear. With tears Giulia assured Mrs. Hamilton that alas! her heart was too much weighed down, beneath the load of earthly feelings, to be in a state to allow any particular tenets, to hold vital influence over it, and as if to illustrate the truth of this assertion, Giulia unfastened the crucifix from her neck, and placed it in Mrs. Hamilton's hand. At that moment a note was presented to her from Nice, and she turned somewhat pale, when her eyes fell upon the hand-writing.

Several notes had arrived from the Italian girl since Giulia's illness, imploring permission to be allowed to come to her and watch over her; but these had been answered by

Mrs Hamilton, saying that as the most perfect quiet had been ordered for the invalid, and Lady de Crespigny had already so many nurses to attend upon her, Mrs. Hamilton must beg she would postpone her visit until the Baroness was somewhat recovered—Mrs. Hamilton had ever mistrusted the Italian girl. Giulia was too ill to have the slightest energy to combat these proceedings, even had she felt any inclination to do so; but now she glanced over an epistle, filled with all the protestations of that passionate tenderness, with which the Italian language is so abundantly supplied—painting in glowing colours, the agony of mind she endured, at being debarred from administering to her friend those tender cares, it had once been her pleasure, that she should bestow upon her; Giulia's heart smote her, and the Italian's influence over her mind, was again exerting its mysterious force. With deep but timid earnestness, she entreated Mrs. Hamilton to allow Nice to visit her.

“ You need not fear,” she said, glancing at the crucifix, “ and with truth I can assure you, that never has Nice taken any part in influencing me on the subject of religion.”

If Mrs. Hamilton had not thought that, for the present, she had taken upon herself a greater degree of authority over her future daughter, than the state of affairs justified, she would have gone still further---have ventured to warn her, that perhaps a *bosom friend* might form as dangerous a foe to her matrimonial prospects, as a difference in religion, and have urged her to begin by degrees to wean herself from an incubus so distasteful to a lover. But for the present Mrs. Hamilton abstained from any further interference, and gave a reluctant consent to admit the Italian girl; however, first coming to an understanding with Giulia that all that had passed between them that day should be a sealed subject.

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Ere long the friends were reunited, and

Nice was still seated by Giulia's side, when a light young form bounded into the room, and a sister's arms were thrown round her neck, and a sister's sweet voice sounded in joyous accents on her ear.

CHAPTER VI.

“ The flash of that dilating eye
Reveals too much of times gone by,
Though varying, indistinct its hue,
Oft will her glance the gazer rue,
For in it lurks that nameless spell
Which speaks, itself unspeakable
A spirit yet unquell'd and high,
That claims and keeps ascendancy.”

THE GIAOUR.

ALL was light and brilliance in the house in Portman Square, the Friday night following. Mrs. Hamilton had thrown open her tastefully arranged apartments for a ball and supper,

which although rather late in the season, was numerously attended by all the *élite* who had remained in London.

At first, however—though with her wonted grace and affability, she performed the honours of the evening—the fair hostess's countenance, to those who understood its variations, gave tokens that she was suffering from some inward anxiety which robbed her of the pleasure of the moment.

Her cheek was flushed—her dark eye turned to the door at every fresh entrance, as if expecting the arrival of some distinguished guest, without whose presence the entertainment would not be complete; some even whispered that the Regent was expected.

But at length, those who had watched Mrs. Hamilton's movements, might have seen a start of pleasure, a lighting up of her eyes—her face redolent with smiles—as she hurried forwards towards the door, to greet a newly arrived guest.

It was, however, her son, Claud Hamilton ! He had only returned to London late that evening, and as he was going to occupy an apartment at an hotel, had not yet been seen by any of his family—indeed his mother did not know that he had arrived.

Claud Hamilton was a great favourite with all, old and young, and his progress from the door was at first much impeded by those who pressed round to greet him ; but he appeared graver than was his wont, and seemed to avoid meeting the anxiously scrutinizing gaze of his mother, who stood amidst the cluster of persons surrounding him—and who, though with seeming carelessness, she joined in the conversation, was evidently watching the expression of his face.

But at length his view across the room was unimpeded, and—the dancers having also just dispersed at the conclusion of a quadrille—for a moment he cast his eye upon a little group opposite—without seeming to observe

the nervous glance with which Mrs. Hamilton would have also directed him to the spot—and then he quietly approached it.

There Giulia was seated, dressed rather à *l'invalide*—a costume, certainly not always becoming. However, the deep red, India shawl in which she was enveloped, was not unsuited to her complexion, and a circle of the de Crespigny diamonds shone brightly in her dark hair.

The young Baroness had never looked so well; she was evidently thinner from the effects of the mental and bodily ailments, from which she had been suffering; but her usually pale cheeks were rather flushed, the red glow lending its aid to increase the brightness, mingled however, with somewhat of languor, with which her serious eyes were lighted up. Her countenance too, bore no trace of its usual gloomy abstraction—it was that of one, who has been suddenly relieved of some torturing anxiety by a ray of bright hope—

“ Hope that thrills so keen
Along each bounding vein.”

one drop of which is sufficient to intoxicate the weakened spirit, which in the new delight, scarcely desires greater bliss ; for if, as it sometime chanceth---from the height—

“ Of joy in minds that can no further go,
As high as we have mounted in delight,
In our dejection, do we sink as low.”

and in the reverse---from the depths of dejection, we are often as suddenly lifted to the height of joy---joy alas ! often doomed to sink again as quickly.

Many eyes were turned on the striking figure which stood at the Baroness's side. It was the Italian girl, her tall form erected to its full height, her eyes bent humbly downwards, then suddenly raised when any sound without reached her ear, with an eager glance in which the fierce glare of the tiger watching for its prey, could scarcely be restrained.

Nice was dressed with her usual simplicity, in white, but adorned on this occasion with the costly pearls, that day received from her friend, as a birth-day gift. A chain and cross of pearls, hung round her neck, and a string of the same, twined round her jetty hair.

These Giulia with her own hand, had placed upon the girl, on their descending together to the ball-room, for Nice had arrived early in Portman Square, and had repaired to Lady de Crespigny's apartment which she was also to share with her that night.

Mrs. Hamilton's consent to this proposal had been wrung from her, by Giulia's earnest entreaties, in order that Nice might not be forced to go away, at the early hour, at which she would have been otherwise obliged to accompany the sickly Marchesa, who with her son was at the ball that night.

Mrs. Hamilton had no tangible reason which she could use as a pretext for not including the Marchese from this entertainment—and di

Lante shewed no symptom of furthering by his assistance the scheme of Fra Paolo, for he seemed carefully to avoid all proximity to the Baroness.

The eyes of the dark Italian, might however have been seen stealthily watching every look and movement of her companion, but when their eyes did meet, she returned his impassioned unpleasing gaze with one of impatient scorn.

It was indeed curious to watch the two girls when they first became aware of Claud's proximity, to behold the different effect which the passion of love wrought upon the different temperaments. The one with her features kindling, as with the reflection of some hidden fire, drawing herself up higher and higher, as if she would have seen above the heads of those who hid him from her sight—whilst Giulia, her head bent down upon her bosom, with closed eyes, and suspended breath, seemed as if she awaited a moment which was to decide her fate for ever.

Notwithstanding these overpowering emotions, she must have called to her aid, the strength and dignity of a woman's pride, for when Claud stood before her, though her heart might flutter high within her breast, she was enabled to meet him with a smile tolerably composed, and with words of greeting, not too tremulously uttered.

And Claud! was it that he had suddenly made up his mind to fulfil his mother's suggestion, and try to love her, or that something in her present manner and appearance interested his feelings, and touched his heart? Perhaps he contrasted with the bold, passionate glance with which he was received by the Italian girl, the womanly dignity that prompted the young Baroness to conceal the sentiments which he had been told she entertained towards him; whatever might have been his inward feelings they certainly had the effect of causing him to turn to her with a sensation of relief.

He was soon seated by her side, gazing kindly into her shrinking eyes—speaking to her in tones, which her fluttering heart now ventured to believe, expressed feelings which in a measure answered to those which beat so warmly in her own breast.

And Nice! for one moment she stood by their side—another glance she cast on Claud, but oh! how different in its character from the last—and then she glided away to a little distance; and whilst the Marchese crept to her side, inattentive to his silent looks of passion, she watched the pair with feelings, no faint index perhaps of those, with which the great enemy of mankind, once gazed upon the happiness of the inhabitants of paradise. For

“ Hell has no fury like a woman scorned,”

and had she not beheld scorn on the countenance of Claud, as he turned from her to smile on her dull, unlovely friend?

Were then worldliness and ambition to conquer—and the strength of beauty and passion to fail? For love! it *could not be* love which warmed his heart towards the dull, passionless thing by whom he now sat; and as the supposition that so it might be, rushed like a flame of fire to her heart—

“ Each passion dimmed her face
Thrice changed with pale ire, envy, and despair.”

So dreadful was the expression of her countenance, that he, whose eyes were fixed upon it, trembled at its appearance.

But the next moment, she remembered herself,

“ Each perturbation smoothed with outward calm.”

and soon a fierce expression of joy illumined her face—for lo! the “ Paradise of fools,” as with an inward smile of scorn, she termed it

— she saw was about to be disturbed, and in as effectual a manner as if her own hand had forged the thunderbolt which was to scatter the new born happiness of her friend.

CHAPTER VII.

“ Band of living Flowers ! O taintless wreath,
* * * * *
O sweet unfolding buds' that blush and breathe
Of innocence and love ! I scarce may dare
To gaze upon ! What soft gleams of hair !
What peaceful foreheads ! and what heavenly eyes !
Bosoms so sweet will never harbour care ;
Such spiritual breath was never made for sighs !
For you still breathe on Earth the gales of Paradise.”

WILSOV.

THE ball-room had become nearly empty, most of the throng having gone to supper, or dispersed in the anti-rooms. Nice still sat in the recess, the Marchese with downcast looks.

by her side ; Giulia and Claud also occupied the same seat, when suddenly a door leading into another apartment was thrown open---a burst of fairy-like merriment resounded, and the next moment, there tripped into the room, a train of children.

“ Like Angels sent by Spring—to usher in the Year.”

Never is the sight of these joyous innocent beings so refreshing to the eyes and heart, as when they appear like natural flowers amidst the forced and sickly scented exotics of a green-house---the brows unruffled by passion-- undimmed by sorrows, or sin ; for although sin, alas ! may---nay ! must be there, its power yet sleeps---unawakened by the world’s exciting contact. Relics they seem of human loveliness---such as graced Paradise.—

“ Cheerful and unchanged.”

In the midst of a fallen world, stained with fear and strife, rife with storms and evil and passions.

This was a group of especial beauty, com-

posed of the younger Hamiltons, and several other children; those fairest specimens of the flowers of the world, with their free and proudly graceful forms--their flowing curls--their bright open countenances.

No eye could fail to turn to gaze upon this beautiful cluster--no tongue to express its admiration; and as Claud and Giulia beheld the joyous train they both uttered an exclamation of admiring pleasure at the sight.

But there was one among them, who seemed to be the Queen Bee of the group, for all strove to press forward, in order to gain the nearest place by her side, every eye to seek a glance of hers, to light up still further joy and glee in their young hearts.

There was something about the little girl, different from the others altogether—not only because her hair fell in jet like showers amongst their golden looks, but because in her cheek, there was less of the bright carnation which flushed theirs. It was tinted with the hue,

with which marble is sometimes tinged; and which, we may have seen chosen, in consequence—as giving more the appearance of life—by some of the great masters, for the sculpture of the human form.

There was a nameless, but distinctive charm in her air and gesture—something so wildly beautiful in her dark eyes, and bounding form, as holding one of the youngest children in each hand, she sprung suddenly forward, as if in playful defiance, endeavouring to escape from her other importunate playfellows!

She was not tall, and her form as child-like as that of some of her companions—although she was the eldest of the little party—and in her face, might be seen mingling beautifully with the innocent, careless mirth of childhood—the sweetness of girlhood's dawning thought and feeling.

The young girl was dressed with greater simplicity than any of the rest; no ornament

was added to her white muslin frock, save one little piece of vanity alone—a carnation-colored ribbon snood—such as at that time began to be worn, confining her hair, and tied in a bow on one side, shewing that some vain nurse or mother, had thought it necessary to add an iota to her beauty, by outward adorning.

The little procession had thus reached the centre of the room. The leader now paused. She had caught sight of the occupants of the apartment; her eye wandered over Giulia and Claud; she stood for a few moments, as if wavering between a feeling of frank confidence, which led her to approach them, and some slight restraining timidity — perhaps caused by the words of admiration which caught her ear. All this, from the first opening of the door had passed in a moment: and, immediately after Claud's exclamation, at first sight of the pretty group, another more energetic had burst from his lips; his eyes at

the same time, fixing themselves upon the object of his admiration.

“ How beautiful ! how charmingly beautiful ! What is she ? Who is she ? ”

The answer came in a voice, deep and knell like.

“ It is my sister, Francesca ! ”

“ Francesca ! how excessively stupid of me ! ” and in another moment, Claud had risen, with extended hands, he hastily approached the little girl, and took hers in both his, saying, as he looked with glad and warm affection in his face—

“ What ! my friend, Francesca ! my little wife, and I not to know her at first. To think you were in the house, and not to have seen you before ; and do you remember me—Claud Hamilton, with whom you used to have such sport, and who you loved as well as he loved you ? Ah ! I hope you have not quite forgotten him.”

“ Oh, no ! ” she answered freely, and her

sweet eyes brightened with animation, as she lifted them towards him—"Oh, no! I have not forgotten you."

The other children pressed around to witness the meeting, and Georgie exclaimed, taking hold of a piece of ribbon which hung round her neck, and shewing two lockets which were suspended to it—

" You gave her this Claud; this, the blue one—she told me so."

" Ah!" exclaimed Claud, " how kind of her to keep it all this time—and my hair in it still! Well, I am glad she did not throw it away," Claud continued, with half real, half affected gratification.

But blushing, and with a pretty little half ashamed, half sly smile, she said,

" No; this is not your hair—it is aunt Gordon's."

" Oh, cruel Francesca! So you did then throw mine away!" Claud reproachfully exclaimed.

“ Oh, no—I did not,” she said, earnestly endeavouring to exculpate herself; “ I gave it to Giulia, because—”

“ Ah, very well!” Claud interrupted hastily; slightly colouring at the same moment, as he dropped the locket, of which, he had taken hold; and raising his head, his eyes fell upon Giulia, who had joined the group, and whose face he saw crimsoned with confusion.

Claud turned again to Francesca, but it was with an inward sigh, and with mere forced cheerfulness, that he continued to talk to her about Shirley and all its old reminiscences, on which subjects she, with pleased animation, gave and volunteered every information.

“ Hector is grown very old,” she said, “ he can scarcely jump out of the window, now.”

“ And you, I hope, are not grown too old, and grave to do so?” enquired Claud.

"Oh, no," she answered, laughingly, "Arno and I still do so, sometimes — though Mrs. Rivers is very much shocked—I believe she thought, I should be doing the same here, if I had brought Arno with me—for she made such a fuss about it, that I was obliged to leave him behind."

Thus they were artlessly chatting and laughing, until the room began to fill again, and Mrs. Hamilton came playfully to drive away the little party thus occupying its centre, in order to clear the way for dancing. She smiled sweetly on the children—particularly on Francesca, whose hand she took as she looked from her to Claud.

"Ah! you have been renewing your acquaintance, I see. You did not know, Claud, that you had such a treat in store, as seeing this pretty little recluse amongst us."

The music struck up at that moment ; the little guests were summoned, most reluctantly on their parts, taken away by their parents, and Mrs.

Hamilton thought it necessary to satisfy the governess's grave remonstrance on the lateness of the hour, by ordering her own children to their beds.

But still holding Francesca's hand she said---

“ You must not go, darling---your aunt has given you up entirely to me, for this night --- therefore, you shall sit up as long as you like, for once. Come, you shall dance with Archie ---he will make you a good little partner,” and she looked round for her boy.

“ Oh, indeed ! Francesca shall have no other partner but me. I think I have the best right to that honor,” cried Claud.

Francesca smiled, and looked all eagerness to accept him for her partner, but Mrs. Hamilton turned and looked towards Giulia, who had retired to her seat, where she now sat with her face averted from them.

Mrs. Hamilton gave her son an expressive glance, and led away Francesca—Claud also

turned his gaze upon the Baroness. She was now looking towards him — their eyes met. He approached and asked her to dance. She declined, and he sat down by her side, in silence.

CHAPTER VIII.

“ Not in those climes where I have late been straying,
Though beauty long hath there been matchless deem'd ;
Not in those visions to the heart displaying
Forms which it sighs but to have only dream'd,
Hath aught like thee in truth or fancy seem'd ;

* * * * *

Young Peri of the West!

BYRON.

NICE had approached Lady De Crespigny's side the moment before, and a few whispered words had passed between them ; but she glided away as she saw Claud coming towards them.

In these few words, however, she had contrived to add the first drop of that gall, with which she subsequently, so plentifully supplied the already sufficiently bitter portion, which her friend's unhappy temper had concocted for herself---one destined to produce such poisonous effects on the happiness of her life.

“La Signorina Francesca,” she had said in a low tone, in which might be detected that slight mingling of “Sneers with smiles,” giving such strength to the sting with which one listens to words, naturally calculated to give pain — “La Signorina Francesca, is quite the beauty of the night --- so it seems, il Signor Claud considers her. It is rather early for her to win all hearts from *us*.”

The wily girl saw the deep pallor spread still deeper over Giulia’s cheek, as she almost gasped in a low, earnest tone, and with an imploring look she could not repress—

“ Is it not late for her to be here?—the other children are gone. Nice, tell her --- tell her---”

Claud then approached as we have seen. Nice suffered some time to elapse before she complied with the unfinished, but well comprehended message---so the music had again struck up, and the dancing commenced, and Francesca was flying like a fleet fawn along the mazes of a country dance --- her eyes

“ Wild as the gazelle’s
Now brightly bold, now beautifully shy,

glancing with glad animation — her sweet laugh, sounding now and then like a little clear silvery bell, amidst the louder music, as her partner, a fair handsome boy, a little younger than herself, strove to direct the wild movements of his partner through

the — to her, unknown intricacies of the figures.

The brilliant lights, the loud, joyous music — the gay, dazzling crowds amongst which she moved — what excitement was it to one, accustomed to dance alone to the accompaniment of her own sweet voice — Arno, her only companion, in the sombre apartments of Shirley Hall !

“ I am shocked to find that your aunt has never yet thought it necessary, to give that little beauty your sister any instruction in dancing,” said Mrs. Hamilton, as she flitted past her son and Giulia ; “ however, I do not think any master could have improved that grace.”

“ No indeed,” said Claud, whose eyes had been following the little girl ever since she had commenced dancing, “ your sister is certainly the prettiest little, graceful creature, Giulia, I ever saw. She reminds me rather of the Spanish beauties ; at least, in that pecu-

liar light, graceful form, which is one of their most striking characteristics. You scarcely ever see an ungraceful Spanish woman. Francesca's eyes are rather too soft for one of those

“Dark glancing daughters,”

as Byron calls them—still altogether she is very like some of those beautiful creatures I used to see in Spain. She will be a lovely woman.”

He turned to Giulia, and saw her pale, dark, and gloomy, she looked the Giulia of other days, and her eyes were directed anxiously towards her sister.

Claud changed the subject to her own health; he remembered that she had been ill, and soon after, Giulia's arm on his, they were going in search of Mrs. Gordon, who, Claud had suddenly expressed a wish to see.

A feeling of relief had by that time stolen over the mind of the Baroness.

Nice, at length, had done her bidding. In a pause of the dance, she approached Francesca, arrested her progress just as she was about to dart off again, and said,

“Your sister thinks it time for you to retire, Signorina—she wishes you to do so immediately.”

“What directly?” Francesca exclaimed in a tone of regret, her eyes wistfully following the dancers.

“Come, come!” her partner cried impetuously, as he held her hands, ready to start off, “don’t stand talking that gibberish,” for they spoke in Italian.

“Ah no!” she said with a sigh, disengaging herself sadly but firmly. “I suppose I must go.”

The boy still remonstrated, but the implicit obedience Mrs. Gordon had inculcated on the young girl’s mind, overcame her willingness to accede to Archie’s persecutions, to disregard it, and she flew away, saying,

“ I will at any rate go and ask my aunt.”

She did not return.

There was a quiet little room on the same floor, as those thrown open to the company, into which but a few privileged persons had ventured to enter ; indeed not many seemed to have much desire so to do for the sentiment of the generality might have been judged by the movements of one party, who having chanced to look in, on the tranquil little group who occupied it, as quickly retreated, saying, in a tone of great horror,

“ Oh ! those are some *good* ones !”

These prescribed persons consisted properly speaking, of two individuals, who though their own hearts might be weaned from the pleasures surrounding them, entertained no censorious feelings towards others, none of those pharaical self-gratulating reflections, which may justly be styled, high treason against religion, in the same manner as

being dull and disagreeable, is said to militate against virtue.

On the contrary they could smile,

“ As through the loop holes of retreat,”

they peeped at the gay world, or heard,

“ The stir—but did not feel the crowd,”

whose sounds of mirth and revelry

“ At a safe distance

Fell a soft murmur on the th’ uninjured ear.”

These two personages were Mrs. Gordon, and Mr. Seymour, the young clergyman, who before has been mentioned. He was one of that class, who,

“ Being honest in the sacred cause,”

to which he avowed himself the servant, both from principle and inclination, carefully eschewed the nearest approach to ought which might seem contrary to its profession.

To see these two beings, the widow with the mild benevolent expression on her still

lovely face, the young minister of the Lord,
with his calm intellectual brow,

“ Pale with thought, but not with care,”

to an imaginative mind, they might have appeared like creatures of another race to those surrounding them; Guardian Angels perhaps, hovering on the threshold of the world, to watch over some loved mortal, exposed to its temptations and its perils.

In the last part of this supposition they might not have been far wrong, for though it was certainly with human feelings, but as pure as such feelings could be, each of their hearts did anxiously follow a dear one amidst that glittering throng.

We may easily imagine that the aunt’s heart was with the spring flower, she had so tenderly reared—

“ Till now—the nursling of the vernal sky,
Bathed with soft dews and fed with air,”

now exposed for the first time, to the glare and sunshine of the sultry world.

But which of those gay creatures who fluttered past, did the heart of the young man follow? which of them did it yearn, to snatch from the dangerous vortex in which she existed---to snatch from worldly pursuits, to glide calmly with him down the clear, pure stream of the life, which it was his destiny to lead. There was one upon whom the observer might have fixed, as the object of his solicitude —one who appeared like himself, though living *in* the world, not *of* it.

It was Annie Hamilton, with her amiable countenance, speaking of something not formed for the sphere in which she mixed, her spirits serene yet cheerful--her cheerfulness, chastened however by the hand of some past sorrow to which she was resigned, though the wound was not yet healed.

Did she not seem formed for the calm, holy duties and affections which would fall to

the lot of the wife of such a man as young Seymour? But God sees not as man sees, and most particularly is this truth illustrated, in such a case as the one before us.

How often do we note the strangest contrasts---the most unlikely fancies in matrimonial connexions---the extremes of opposites coming together! and strange to say amalgamating wonderfully well---the gay, frivolous, worldly mind, succumbing to the charms of sober sense and intellect; the wise even loving the fool.

Mrs. Hamilton had often entered, to hunt out of this little oasis, one whom the ball-room could but ill-afford to lose, one who seemed, strange to say, greatly to enjoy the company of "the good people" who there congregated; and this was her own pretty, scornful Gertrude, who with the utmost evident reluctance, would on these summons allow herself to be handed off by some

Cavalier, who had been hovering impatiently round the door to carry her away.

Was the listless countenance---the undisguised want of zest in the pleasures of the evening, caused by disappointment attendant on the absence of Lord Beverley ? He had sent an excuse on the plea of being suddenly called away to the country.

Many gave this reason for the cause of the fair Gertrude's listless manner. What would they have thought, had they beheld her, when she could again escape from amongst them and in the quiet retreat---of which she seemed so strangely to have become enamoured ---once more all laughter and animation--then all gentle thoughtfulness ; as if a new and sweeter spirit, than that which usually awakened the spoilt young beauty's breast, had suddenly entered it.

This was not like disappointment, or pique. Ah ! Mrs. Hamilton, where have been your eyes for the last month ?

Beware, lest whilst straining your gaze after the lofty designs to which you aspire, you overlook what is passing immediately around you. Hearts! may be escaping from your influence—hearts which you think are within your control, but which may prove not so subservient as you imagine---which may make for themselves wings, and fly away, far from your dominion.

It was in this same boudoir, of which we have been speaking, that Francesca, all glowing with excitement, had flown to her aunt, and told her tale—“Was she to go to bed?” her eyes asked imploringly.

“Certainly, dearest, if your sister advises it. She is more experienced than we are in the effects of dissipation, and does not wish doubtless, to see you tired and ill, the remainder of your stay in London---I shall not be sorry to accompany you.”

They were leaving the room together, when Giulia and Claud entered, and a cordial greet-

ing took place between Mrs. Gordon, and the young man, who soon however turned his attention to her little niece.

He was sorry when he heard that she was going to bed.

“ I wanted to have had a dance with you, Francesca,” he said, “ and it is provoking, I have to go to Windsor to-morrow, with my father—we could have gone off together to see all the sights ; but I shall be back the next day, and then we will make the best of our time.”

Claud held the young girl’s hand, as he spoke, and she was looking up smiling in his face.

“ What you will carry her off--cruel Mrs. Gordon?” he said as she made an advance to the door, “ May I”—and he looked at the aunt, with a smile and slight shade of increased colour—“ may I, for old acquaintance sake—my little sister you know—my little—” wife, he was going to say, but stopped short, and seeing no

look of denial in Mrs. Gordon's eyes, he stooped and affectionately kissed Francesca's lips.

She gave one of her merry ringing laughs, and darted off before her aunt.

Under what circumstances did those two beings meet again? Claud followed Francesca with his eyes, and then turned to seek for Giulia--she was gone.

CHAPTER IX.

What boots it to teach my heart a task
So vain as weeping beneath a mask ?
Broken—with only ruins to hide,
Little it recks, of the show of pride.

L. E. L.

YES—Giulia had by this time sought her own apartment, locked the door, and glancing at her pale face in the mirror, removed the glittering circle from her brow, which seemed to

mock with its radiance the gloomy countenance it adorned ; and then she sunk upon a seat.

It was not with the calm hopeless misery which had before oppressed her—more agonising than any suffering she had ever experienced, were her present feelings. Hope had once been inspired in her breast — hope which she could not relinquish. It had quickened her every energy—strengthened her to struggle against obstacles.

Remaining thus motionless for nearly an hour, her hands clasped tightly together, her eyes fixed in absorbing thought, she at length arose, took a taper from the table and walked to the door. At the same moment that she turned the handle, another hand did the same from the outside. It was Nice.

Both the girls gazed on each other's faces for a moment, and then Giulia passed on, saying in a hollow voice,

"I shall be back presently---I am going to my aunt."

Ah another confidant!" murmured the Italian girl to herself, as the Baroness departed. "Poor fool!" and she entered the room.

She also walked as Giulia had done, to the mirror, and gazed upon her face, but as it would seem with a far different impression. She lifted Giulia's diamond *bandeau* from the table, and placed it on her brow---and her eyes flashed, and her lip curled proudly, as there she stood gazing upon the beautiful reflection before her.

The moments flew away unconsciously---so deeply were her ideas occupied by all the thoughts, purposes, plans, and suggestions which crowded thick and fast into her mind. She continued to muse, when a voice awakened her from her reverie, and a step in the passage. One more glance in the mirror, and with the diamonds still sparkling on her brows, she opened the door and stepped without.

But we will first follow Giulia to her aunt's apartment.

Mrs. Gordon was seated calmly reading when after a low knock, the door opened, and she beheld her niece, pale, and so haggard, her eyes so wild and eager!

“ Dear Giulia,” she exclaimed, “ are you ill?” and she was about to rise, when Giulia sunk upon her knees before her, buried her face upon her lap, and faltered forth---

“ Oh, aunt, I am come to implore your mercy, your pity---you will despise me, you will scorn me, but I cannot help it. I was born for wretchedness---for humiliation---but oh! you are kind, you are pitiful---you can feel for weakness, and compassionate misery such as mine.”

“ Giulia!” exclaimed Mrs. Gordon terrified by this scene, “ for mercy's sake tell me quickly---what do you mean?”

“ Hear me then, my aunt, but do not kill me by your scorn.”

She paused, her voice died away to a whisper, as with a look of terror, she glanced around at a little couch placed near Mrs. Gordon's bed, whence the sound of soft breathing was heard.

"She sleeps," the aunt whispered in a soothing tone; "fear not, she will not awake. She was too weary, poor child; tell me, dear Giulia, for you have alarmed me much, to what do you allude, and how can I serve you?"

"Take her, take her away," gasped Giulia, "take her back to Shirley."

"My dear Giulia, what can you mean, what your sister?" began Mrs. Gordon in a tone of surprise.

"Yes, my sister—she who I told you years ago, was destined to be the destroyer of my happiness, the poisoner of my peace."

"Giulia, Giulia!" interposed Mrs. Gordon in a tone of reproach.

"Oh yes," she continued passionately, "she

stole from me the love of my parents—she made me appear as a mere nothing in their eyes—she deprived me of the affection of all created beings, of that love for which I pined in my miserable childhood, the want of which drove me into that lonely solitude of heart, and fostered dispositions and feelings which render me hateful to myself---to all around me. And now, now,” and she lowered her voice, “when a ray of hope has dawned upon my heart, which, if it departs, must leave me in the deepest darkness of misery for ever---she---she---has come across my path to snatch it from me.”

Mrs. Gordon was truly shocked. She had not been admitted formally into her niece’s secret, which would at once have interpreted this fearful outbreak, but if she had not before entertained suspicions on the subject, woman’s quick witted perception in such matters now came to her assistance; she therefore did not press for any clearer explanation as

to what this ray of hope might be. But when Giulia paused, exhausted by her vehemence, she said, in a grave tone of reproach,

“ Poor Francesca ! how truly innocent she is of having given cause for offence ! Giulia this is indeed culpable weakness, as well as unnatural conduct. Dear child ! well may she weep over the beauty, which is to draw upon her the hatred of her sister, her only near relative on earth---the relation to whom she ought to have been able to look, for the love and tenderness almost of the mother she has lost, rather than receive from her, notice which almost savours of aversion.”

“ Aversion ! ah no, aunt !” cried Giulia, in a softened tone, as she approached the bed where Francesca lay, her long eyelashes resting on her cheeks, still flushed by excitement ; her lips parted with a smile of glad though calmer expression, than that with which she had sunk to rest, to renew in her dreams the enjoyment of the evening. “ Aversion ! ah no,” she

again cried, and as if softened by the sight of that sweet face, tears rolled down her cheeks. “God knows I would love her, that I blame her not for being so loved, so beautiful,” and she pressed her hands tightly on her heart as if to suppress its pains. “But oh! how can I not *fear*, yes fear that beauty, that attraction, aye perhaps even *hate* it, when it is the means of rendering me so miserable.”

“Well Giulia,” said Mrs. Gordon gravely, but gently, truly distressed at this specimen of the undiminished power of those most morbid, unhappy tendencies in her niece’s mind, which she had done her best to eradicate—and so vainly.

“Tell me,” she continued, “what you wish me to do—All that is consistent with propriety and justice, I am ready to perform, to relieve your present source of anxiety; though I fear, Giulia, that with such unhappy fancies, it can be but a very temporary relief—But I must have no concealments—I must understand you thoroughly.”

“ Yes, aunt, you shall hear all—I have sunk already too low in your estimation, and indeed in that of my own, to shrink from any confession, however humiliating,” and again falling on her knees before Mrs. Gordon, she confessed all the history of her love---the hopes that had been raised in her heart--her bitter agony caused by the idea that the attractive charms of her sister, with which Claud was so deeply struck, might dash from her grasp those hopes which had just begun to put forth buds of such sweet promise. His heart, she said, would be drawn again from her; therefore she implored her aunt to depart immediately with Francesca before the impression that had been made upon his mind, should be strengthened even by a second sight of her sister; she besought her to make some plausible excuse for thus suddenly leaving them, to prevent the chance of exciting surprise and opposition to so unlooked for a proceeding. Her happiness---or misery, she vehemently declared, was at

stake. She might fail even then to secure the heart for which she panted ; but still she might hope---she would at least be spared the agony of seeing him whom she loved so well, turn from her with neglect---nay with disgust --at the first tone of her sister's voice--the first sight of her beautiful face.

“ You wonder, perhaps, my aunt, at my presumptuous, mad hopes ; but the being who stands on the shore, may wonder at the folly of the drowning wretch who catches at a straw ---you know not the tenacity with which a miserable creature clings to a hope like mine.”

Mrs. Gordon was inexpressibly shocked. She saw plainly that reasoning with her niece at this moment, would be worse than fruitless ; though as she glanced in her mind's eye rapidly over the future, she trembled more at the thought of the fulfilment of the wishes thus impetuously desired, than from the idea of now in any way impeding them ; however she said—

“ I think it will be impossible to go to-morrow, Giulia.”

“No ?” Giulia cried in a tone of alarm; but the next moment she added eagerly in a tone of relief—“ Well but the next day ! *He* will be at Windsor to-morrow. Oh, aunt, bless you---bless you for this ! Only let 'me obtain this one—this glorious possession—his love, and I will return to you so changed—I will desire nought else that this world can bestow: and Francesca shall be loved—loved, as *you* even would have her loved. I feel that once secure of his affections---and my whole being would be altered. The shadow that has darkened my heart would be removed ! a new light—a new existence would be given to it !”

“ Dear Giulia,” said Mrs. Gordon, with a feeling of astonishment—almost of alarm at this violent excitement of passion, “sincerely I wish you success in ought that would be likely to add to your future happiness; but remember, there is but one means which can

effect the change of which you speak. No circumstance of life---no summit of what appears to you, earthly bliss, will draw away that dark shade which obscures your happiness---*till your heart is changed*---till that spirit--the fruits of which are love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance, has dispersed its blessed influence over it. No earthly love can say "Peace be still!" to the storm raging within--it must be the love of Him, who calmeth the raging of the sea, and the madness of the people, which must first find entrance there. Giulia I will keep my promise—I will act as you desire, if you do not, when the time arrives, repent, or see the folly and weakness, which has prompted that which you require of me. But, my dear child, let me entreat you this night, ere you lay down your head on your pillow, to pray—as you have never done before---for that love of which I spoke; then indeed you will find a new light—a new existence irra-

diating your soul ; then, though your dearest hopes may be found fruitless---even those with which you are now so fearfully excited---you will be able to bear their destruction, as coming from the hand of mercy."

Giulia, awed and softened by her aunt's earnest appeal, sobbed---wept---and promised all---even to bear with resignation the overthrow---if so it happened, of her dearest hopes. She approached her sister's bed---she kissed her cheek and the hot tears fell upon it.

Francesca awoke--started, and looked around her, at first with bewilderment ; but soon recognizing her sister, she exclaimed cheerfully---

" Oh, is it you Giulia ?" and flung her arms around her neck.

" I am sorry that I have awakened you, Francesca," Giulia faltered.

" Oh, no, never mind---I am so glad to be awakened by a kiss ; particularly from *you*, Giulia," she added in a tone a little

tinged wlth sadness, "I was however dreaming a delightful dream--I thought I was dancing to that sweet music with Claud."

Giulia disengaged herself from her arms, and murmuring a good night, departed.

It was long before Mrs. Gordon could seek her bed ; this scene with Giulia troubled and grieved her. She trembled for her niece ; she feared that her happiness--her peace of mind, had been destroyed, by the worldly and ambitious views of Mrs. Hamilton--by the manner in which she had raised Giulia's hopes. She grieved also for Claud. That manly, noble, generous heart !---was it to be thus bartered ---for what ? Mrs. Gordon's unworldly nature shrunk with disgust from the idea.

There was something in her mind, which revolted against the thought of a union between Claud and Giulia--they did not in her imagination seem formed for each other. Did she do right to leave her niece exposed to so much temptation ?

And then the aunt stole to her own Francesca's side, who was again sleeping peacefully ---a tear, however, glittering on her jetty lashes, drawn from the little feeling heart, which had melted at the symptom of affection, alas! in general so sparingly evinced by her sister. And must she too be one day cast on a world like this---exposed to its dangers ---its pollution, a prey to the passions---the frailties it ever engenders, if not in her own heart, at least in those of others. How could she escape the ordeal, as pure as fair in heart, as now she was--and she so beautiful !

“ I fear thy gentle loveliness,
Thy witching tone and air,
Thine eye's beseeching earnestness
May be to thee a snare.
The silver stars may purely shine,
The waters taintless flow—
But they who kneel at woman's shrine,
Breathe on it as they bow.
Ye may fling back the gift again
But the crushed flower will leave a stain.

What shall preserve thee beautiful child
Keep thee as thou art now?
Bring thee a spirit undefiled
At God's pure throne to bow?
The world is but a broken reed,
And life grows early dim
Who shall be near thee in thy need
To lead thee up—to Him?
He, who himself was undefiled
With Him we trust thee beautiful child.'

CHAPTER X.

“ Oh, what authority and show of truth
Can cunning sin cover itself withal!

SHAKSPEARE.

Oh, turn from the false tongues that flatter,
* * * * *
Oh think of the thorns they would scatter
O'er thy path in the dark winter time.

H. BAYLEY.

CLAUD, on perceiving Giulia's disappearance, had sunk down on a seat by his friend Seymour, and conversed with him for some time; once while so doing, he happened to

look up, and met the gaze of a pair of fiery eyes glaring upon him---they were those of Nice. He had passed afterwards into the ball-room, to take leave of his mother---and still those eyes gleamed upon him through the crowd wherever he moved; like some fiery planets, ever present to the traveller's sight, as he passes further and further on his way

He had gone up stairs before leaving the house, to ask his father, who had retired from the company, some particulars, as to the hour they were to set off on their next day's expedition, and again in a passage through which he had to pass for that purpose, he was way-laid as it were, by a glittering apparition—Nice stood before him!

He glanced over her with some surprise, but with astonishing coolness and calmness, considering that she did indeed look most dazzlingly beautiful, as she stopped, as if at first

startled at beholding a different person to the one she had expected.

She lowered for a moment her shining orbs, murmuring in her softest tones,

“ Oh ! I thought it was Lady de Cres-pigny !”

“ Did you ?” he answered somewhat sarcastically, “ well, I am glad to have had the opportunity of seeing how well diamonds become *la bella Nice*.”

“ Ah !” she exclaimed, putting her hand to her forehead, as if she had forgotten that they had there been placed. “ Fool that I am to play the child, and deck the brow with jewels, which will soon be darkened by the convent’s veil, “ and she raised her eyes with a mild, sad expression to the young man’s face.

“ Oh no, Nice, I hope not !” he answered carelessly.

“ Who---who will save me from it ?” she exclaimed---her glance assuming its fiercer brightness.

“ Why,” he resumed in a somewhat marked tone, “ it is a pity the Marchese did not stand here instead of me; the effect of those diamonds on your beauty, would, I think, be sufficient to complete the conquest, which, if my eyes have not deceived me, la Nice has already made upon his inflammable heart; and then I think there would be no need for her to

“ Endure the livery of a nun,
For aye to be in shady cloister mewed,
To live a barren sister all your life,
Chanting faint hymns to the cold fruitless moon.”

“ The Marchese,” she exclaimed, her eyes flashing fire, “ never would I owe my release to him! If that were all,” she added, changing her tone to one of deep, quiet meaning, “ the diamonds could produce no greater effect upon his already chained heart; nor were I the actual possessor of the jewels would his admiration be increased; for his foolish fancy

less wise than others, looks alone to the picture, not to the golden frame."

Claud fixed his eyes upon the girl, as if endeavouring to understand the meaning of her marked tone and words; he coloured slightly, and saying, carelessly,

"Well, Nice, I really am sorry I can propose no more agreeable alternative," with a still colder glance, passed on.

"The last struggle is over, and I am free! Hate, revenge, be henceforth all that you need fear from me, Claud Hamilton. Scorn! aye, twice to brook that look of scorn!" and Nice stamped her foot and clenched her hand. "It is enough," again she said, and she re-entered the bed chamber, and removed the diamonds from her brow. The fury that had for a moment defaced her countenance vanished, and she sat down calm and collected to await the Baroness. Claud did not leave the house without another encounter. At the end

of the same passage Giulia appeared before him, hurrying along—her dark hair falling about her flushed cheeks; but at the sight of him, she sprang backwards, with no unaffected dismay, shrinking as if she imagined he could read in her face, all that had passed in the scene, which had just taken place between herself and aunt.

Again her very weakness did her more service, than she could have imagined.

Claud knew that he stood before one who loved him with love unsought, unrequited; but still it is strange how a weak woman bowed low beneath the influence of such a feeling seems to rise in man's estimation; particularly when seen in contrast with one who appears, in the least to usurp their own prerogative, strength and boldness.

“It is only me, Giulia,” Claud said kindly, “I have been up-stairs to speak to my father. Good night,” he added, still more softly, as Giulia murmured, that she had been talking

to her aunt, “ I shall not see you to-morrow, but shall be back early the next morning. Good night—you should have been in your bed by this time, particularly as you have been lately so ill ; it is not good for you to sit up so late.”

Giulia returned to her friend, her heart bursting with the increased agitation of these few cherished words. She sat down, and covered her face with her hands, as if to hide the emotion expressed in it.

A soft voice murmured in her ear.

“ Unkind Giulia ! she has been pouring forth into another’s ear, the secrets of her heart, and she would now fain hide from Nice, even her face, lest there they might be read by her ; she who once was trusted with every thought, every feeling.”

Giulia looked up. It was not the Nice, arrogant and overbearing, as she of late had displayed herself to her friend, but the humble and devoted Nice, kneeling by her side, her

eyes raised with an air of gentle, loving re-proach.

“ Ah, dear Nice,” Giulia faltered, “ do you not know all---too well ?”

“ I do, but not from you ; not from your lips have I learnt the history of all the bliss that awaits you.”

“ Bliss, Nice !” cried Giulia.

“ Yes, who that has eyes cannot see, that Giulia will be the wife of Claud Hamilton, oh ! prospect of delight !”

To Giulia’s charmed ear, these words fell, like notes of sweetest harmony. All restraint, all concealment was at an end. A full confession of her hopes and fears were poured forth to her friend, and Nice listened, and encouraged, and cheered, till morning dawned upon them, and Giulia then saw that Nice was pale, pale as death, and at length that she was weeping—yes, Nice, whom she had never seen weep before. And what meant those tears ? were they the farewell to every spark

of loveliness, of good feeling, which might still have lingered in the soul, which had, vowed itself henceforth to the serpent's task.

Be it as it might, they were timely tears, and suited her purpose, as well as the resigned and grief struck tone which accompanied them.

“ And I, Giulia,” she cried, “ oh, what is to be my wretched fate, a living death?”

And then those tears were wiped away, and protestations, vows, came from the excited Giulia's lips, that her friendship, her protection should shield her friend from the fate she dreaded; she solemnly promised the Italian girl a home with her for ever, a place in her heart —even the one next to him who might be her husband.

“ You promise this,” cried Nice! “ then swear that no power shall separate us; neither the influence of love, or hatred. Swear that you will be true to me, that you will shut

your ears to ought that may militate against me---calumnies, insinuations! that you will believe *nothing* but that I am, through good report, and evil report, however circumstances, and enemies may appear against me--that you will, I repeat, only believe *one fact*, that I am your faithful, devoted friend! Will you swear this solemnly, Giulia?" continued the Italian girl, her eyes gleaming fiercely, her face livid with paleness; " and moreover give me this assurance, written with your own hand on paper. This alone can defer the arrangements which are preparing for my immediate departure for the convent. My uncle will be thus assured of the asylum provided for his orphan niece, and will think no longer that his duty requires him, to force her to a vocation which she loathes.

Nice brought writing implements--she placed a pen in Giulia's hand, and dictated the following words :--

“I solemnly swear, that Nice Cellini,
the devoted and much-loved friend of my youth,
shall never want a place in my home and heart,
as long as she wishes to retain it.

Signed,

GIULIA DE CRESPIGNY.”

August, 1819

It was sealed and placed in Nice's bosom.

CHAPTER XI.

“ His words are bonds, his oaths are oracles ;
His love sincere, his thoughts immaculate ;
His tears pure messengers, sent from his heart ;
His heart as far from fraud, as heaven from earth.

SHAKSPEARE.

As Mr. Hamilton and Claud pursued their way to Windsor the next day, the former suddenly thus addressed his son.

“ Well, Claud, have you made up your

mind about this appointment — for it is upon that subject, Lord — — wishes to see you."

"It is too good a thing to be rejected in a hurry," was the somewhat hesitating answer.

"Your mother, however," Mr. Hamilton continued with a faint smile, "seems to have set her mind against it."

He waited as if for an answer, but Claud continued silent.

"I can assure you," the father pursued, "I had quite a scene with her this morning, when she heard where we were going, and rather surprised me by a communication."

Claud looked very grave.

"What did she tell you?" he demanded in a voice somewhat hoarse.

"That she had suggested to you, something much more to your advantage," his father replied.

"And what do you say to it, father?" Claud

demanded, fixing his eyes earnestly on Mr. Hamilton's face.

“ That, Claud, must depend entirely on your own feelings. I will give you my cordial opinion on the subject; I think it would be a most desirable proceeding—a most important advantage to yourself and many belonging to you—but, at the same time, I would almost as soon see you wedded to a girl without a farthing, as contracting a mere mercenary, interested marriage — one, which could not lead to your future happiness. This is all that I can have to say on the subject, my dear fellow !”

Alas ! what a contrast to the rhetoric of the wife — a contrast we fear, by which the gentler sex but too often suffer.

There was a pause of some moments. Were not the words of his father encouragement to Claud, to cast away for ever, any lingering scruples he might still entertain on the subject,

and reject, at once, all thoughts of the Baroness !

Some may call him weak—it may be so—but weakness such as his, is a frailty most beautiful—more valuable in our eyes, than the most Spartan firmness of character. It was the fruit of that virtue, which alas ! seems almost extinct in the world in these later days amongst men—an unselfish heart!—a heart in which self reigns not---and his father's speech, frank, open, affectionately manifesting how little selfish considerations weighed in comparison with his son's happiness, touched his heart more than all the worldly tact of his mother's persuasions had done.

Claud looked upon his father's head, blanching more he knew from cares than age---he brought to mind, all the various perplexities that were pressing upon him---his struggles for his children, and should *he* think but of himself?

“ I was reminding your mother of one cir-

cumstance," suddenly resumed Mr. Hamilton, thus showing that he had still been dwelling on the subject; "something of which, she did not seem to be aware---namely, that Giulia de Crespigny cannot marry, even with the consent of her guardians, till she is of age."

"Indeed!" interrupted Claud, with eagerness; "that will, at once, settle the matter; I shall accept this appointment, certainly; whatever step," he murmured to himself, "I may persuade myself to take before setting out."

The appointment was that day conferred upon him and accepted. On returning to London the next morning, Claud found that Mrs. Gordon and Francesca had departed. That lady, on not receiving from Giulia any intimation to the contrary, had fulfilled the promise she had made to her niece, and--without thinking it necessary to distress her conscience by inventing any pretext for this sud-

den determination--merely saying, that unexpected circumstances rendered it necessary for her to do so, she departed with her young niece ; who, with implicit confidence in her aunt's wisdom and goodness, scarcely allowed a murmur to escape, at being thus carried off from so many delights, but could not forbear shedding a few natural tears, at parting from them all--and especially, without seeing Claud again, who was to have taken her to so many charming sights.

All were grieved to part from the little girl, who had won all hearts by her beauty and engaging disposition, and all were somewhat curious to discover the cause of Mrs. Gordon's whim--as Mrs. Hamilton called it--who supposed it was owing to a little touch of the good lady's methodism. Probably, she must have discerned some slight shade of London pollution already working in her niece ; who, certainly, by-the-bye, did her credit in every

way--for really, she saw no signs of the cloven foot in her pretty little pupil.

“Really,” Mrs. Hamilton added, “I shall have great pleasure in taking her out some of these days -- for, I am sure she will not be long on hand,” and then, some vision of the beautiful girl, and her large fortune, would enter her fertile imagination as connected with Henry, her second son -- which *parti*, she had no doubt, would be far easier to manage, than the one now pressing on her mind.

In short, the thoughts of both mother and daughters seemed so occupied by other interests, that Giulia was spared hearing as many comments on her sister’s departure, as she would otherwise have done. Even when Mr. Hamilton and Claud returned, though much surprised, the latter seemed too melancholy to express his feelings on the subject, with as much animation as Giulia had expected.

What a relief this was to her jealous heart ; and the evident depression of Claud, she almost hailed as symptoms in her favour.

Mrs. Hamilton had learnt, in the meantime, that the appointment was accepted, and was forced to be resigned. She now lived in the hope of the proposal being made before her son's departure, as there was now, no possibility of the affair being completed before the Baroness had attained her majority. She even judged it advisable---knowing that she could go no further at present, with her future daughter-in-law---to take upon herself the office of informing Giulia of the business ; insinuating at the same time, as if to give a favorable color to the proceeding, that the restriction placed upon the period at which she might marry, was the chief reason of Claud's thus banishing himself from her presence. Giulia colored, and answered in some confusion, but

even this intelligence filled her with energy and hope.

Of Claud's intentions on the subject, Mrs. Hamilton could gain no clue--for her husband had strictly forbid her again to mention the subject, or to endeavour in any way to bias his opinions with regard to the important decision.

But, at length, the day arrived, on which, before its conclusion, the fate of many within that house was to be brought to a conclusion — an eventful day, indeed it proved!

The exact time at which Claud would have to leave England, had not yet been quite ascertained; but the morning in question, he received the sudden intimation that it would be necessary for him to be ready to embark that day week.

He went immediately to acquaint his father with this intelligence, and found his mother also in the study. She wept with tears of unmixed sorrow, at the idea of so

soon parting with her beloved Claud ; but when that affectionate son was endeavouring to soothe her by his caresses and encouragement, the spirit of her worldly feelings returned, and she entreated him in the most pathetic and imploring tones, to make her happy ere he departed, in the manner he knew she so ardently desired.

“ Anne !” interrupted her husband, in a voice almost of sternness, as Claud stood, pale and distressed before them ; “ On the contrary, Claud, under pain of my displeasure, *I desire* you will do nothing from the impulse of the moment. To press him to take such a step, which will decide his fate for life, is unnatural, selfish, and cruel. I should consider it folly and weakness in him, to give way to the wish, even of his mother, if his own feelings in the least degree rebel against it.”

Here was a thunderbolt for Mrs. Hamilton. She was silent — she could no longer

hope, that without the aid of his father's wishes, the scruples of her son could any longer be combated.

This was a miserable day in Portman Square. However, one event before the evening somewhat revived the sanguine spirits of Mrs. Hamilton. It was not regarding this business of Claud's, but another from which she had also been suffering almost equal disappointment. Lord Beverley had never yet returned to London—and she had begun to suspect, that though he talked of returning, now that the season was over, he had no intention of so doing. Gertrude—poor Gertrude! And, not only did Mrs. Hamilton's worldly heart bleed at the idea of the disappointment inflicted on her young daughter, but the *mother's* heart was sore—for it was she who had raised her hopes. She had kept alive her expectations—and though pride evidently subdued every expression of her daughter's wounded feelings, she noticed

of late, that she had become low-spirited, and much changed—so gentle and subdued---so unlike herself. It grieved her to behold her thus ; rather would the mother have seen the beautiful Gertrude as was her wont—less amiable, perhaps, but full of joy and glee.

And Annie too grieved for her sister, as much perhaps because it was a sad confirmation of the character of one, from whom once she had been loath to cast away the last remnant of regard, which had even survived the love which her strength of mind had taught her to repress.

She had long observed Lord Beverley's attentions to Gertrude dying away ; she had seen, as she imagined, his manœuvres to extricate himself from the dilemma ; he had even the effrontery to make *her*---his first love---a cat's paw, *faute de mieux*, for that purpose. He thought, no doubt, there was no fear of his being

accused of matrimonial views, when found so often by the side of the *plain* Miss Hamilton, honouring *her* with a few unmeaning attentions.

These attentions had made her heart thrill, at first, it was true, by the reminiscences they produced of other days, but they were now received with cold civility, more calculated to abash the confident, than even the most indignant scorn emanating from a piqued heart. Annie Hamilton soon shewed his lordship that she intended not to lend herself to be a tool for the furtherance of his plans.

On the afternoon of this day as Mrs. Hamilton and Annie were driving through Regent's street, a gentleman rode up to the carriage. It was Lord Beverley. Both ladies saluted him with coldness.

“ I only returned,” he said, in an agitated voice, “ last night; I was going this morning

to your house, but was prevented. Where are you going to-night?" he eagerly added, "shall you be at the opera?"

"Perhaps?" said Mrs. Hamilton, trying to speak, and look with as much coldness and indifference as possible, "but Gertrude is not very well—we are none of us very bright, for Claud is soon to leave us for America."

"Oh, you must go, it will do you good," and Lord Beverley gave a timid glance at Annie, as if to sue for her assistance to bring about the accomplishment of his wishes—"The music will do Miss Gertrude good; and I must see you there," he added, lowering his voice, as he bent down and patted his horse, "do not you look cold upon me, Mrs. Hamilton, or indeed it will be all over with me," and Lord Beverley rode suddenly away.

Mrs. Hamilton looked at Annie, but she

knew she was not so mercifully or partially inclined towards Lord Beverley as herself, and was ashamed to confess how this little interview had raised her vexed spirits. She however went home, and ordered the most becoming toilette to be prepared for Gertrude.

But this was only a slight palliative to her perplexed feelings—what vexation and trouble had she brought upon herself! and not only were her long cherished hopes about to be dashed to the ground, but Giulia! she was doomed to the bitterest disappointment. In what a position was she placed in regard to the Baroness, after all that had passed between them.

“ All—all is vanity and vexation of spirit!”

Mrs. Hamilton was ready to cry for the moment, the favourite exclamation of the worldly, disap-

pointed of some darling fancy ; ejaculated oft-times, even at the same time the hand is outstretched to grasp some other desire, unmindful that it may perchance end with the same repining cry.

CHAPTER XII.

Thy weal and woe are both of them extremes,
Despair and hope make thee ridiculous.

SHAKSPERE'S POEMS.

Cling I must to somewhat—
Leave me one guide—one rest!

LANDOR.

AND Giulia, she had been out all the morning on an expedition to Hampton Court, planned by Mrs. Hamilton the night before; it was arranged under the pretext of showing it to

Mr. Seymour, who by the byc was still their guest. He was to escort the party, which consisted, besides Giulia, of Gertrude, to whom Mrs. Hamilton thought the expedition might be of use, and some of the children and their governess. But the part of the arrangement, most to the purpose, was, that Claud was to meet them on horseback, after concluding some business which would prevent him setting out at the same time.

It is unnecessary to say that the news he had heard of his unexpected summons put all idea of the expedition far from his thoughts.

Giulia therefore expected him in vain, and with no great enjoyment, had paraded over the palace, and gardens, accompanied chiefly by the little party; for Gertrude and Mr. Seymour were very dilatory in their movements, lingering so long over some picture, or beautiful spot in the gardens—little did she imagine all that awaited her on her return home!

She had gone at once into her room, for it was not very far from the dinner hour, ordered early on account of the opera. Just as she was about to ring for her maid, little Georgie ran into her room, as he generally did at that time, but he looked graver than was his wont.

“Mama is so sorry,” he said at length with a sigh.

“What about, Georgie?” Giulia asked.

“Oh Claud is going away.”

“When—not yet?” she eagerly enquired of the child.

“Oh yes—he is going very soon—not to-morrow, but in a very few days; he told me so himself just now.”

Giulia sat down; she felt sick and faint, but recovered herself with an effort.

“Are you sorry?” said the child, fixing his eyes curiously upon her altered countenance.

“Yes, very sorry, Georgie,” she murmured.

“ Ah!” said the little fellow, as a flash of recollection seemed to cross his mind, “ I remember Claud and Mama talked about you one day.”

Giulia lifted up her head with an eager look.

“ I wanted to go on riding, and I thought they never would have done.”

“ What did they say about me?” she faltered, ashamed of the feeling of curiosity which prompted the question.

“ Oh, I don’t know. Mama said you never eat anything, and that you never slept, and you were very good, but not very beautiful—she wanted Claud to do something, and Claud did not like it, and he said—oh, I wont tell you what!”

Perhaps Georgie if the words *had* escaped which were trembling on your little lips “ *He said he did not love you,*” it had been better, though they might for ever have banished any further possibility of Giulia’s fate

being linked with that of Claud Hamilton ; for although, as it were, she had heard enough to cause all the circumstances of the case to rise up before her tortured imagination with very nearly the same clearness as if the words had been spoken, yet there is something in the sound of a word once uttered, which can never be entirely expunged from the memory even by time. In words spoken there can be no mistake ; whilst indistinct communications such as Georgie had made her, might at some future time be forgotten, or looked upon perhaps as erroneously interpreted.

But as we have said, what she had already heard was sufficient ; she sat listening breathlessly till they were finished, and then sprang up, as if a bullet had struck her, and to the surprise and horror of Georgie, sunk down on her knees on the ground, and burying her face in her hands, groaned aloud. The child stood gazing on her for some time, and then pulling her dress, said, in a frightened voice,

“ Giulia, Giulia—why do you do that? I must run away if you hide your face.”

This seemed to arouse her—she arose, rang her bell, and bade her maid order a carriage to be brought round as soon as possible. She had no energy to say more, but suffered herself mechanically to be attired in the evening dress which had been prepared for her.

Georgie stood watching her toilette, but in silence, for he saw something was wrong. The family had sat down to dinner, a message having been delivered that Lady de Crespigny was fatigued, and would not come down. This was a relief to more than one of the party. They were however somewhat surprised on hearing a carriage drive away from the door towards the end of the repast, and still more so when told that it contained Lady de Crespigny, who, the servants added, had ordered it to drive to Mivart’s.

On the carriage stopping before the hotel, the equipage of the Marchesa was waiting at

the door, and Giulia, on entering the house, encountered that lady and Nice coming down stairs.

Both started at meeting so unexpected an apparition. Giulia was deadly pale, and at first could scarcely speak.

At length she contrived to say in a low, faint voice as she clung to the banisters---

“ Do not let me detain you---I wish to speak to Fra Paolo.”

The Marchesa seemed satisfied with this explanation, and proceeded to the carriage, for she was going to take coffee with a *compatriote*, before proceeding to the opera. Nice however lingered behind—curiosity struggling violently in her breast.

“ Quick—quick, Giulia!” she cried following her up stairs, “ for the love of Heaven what has happened?”

But the servant came after them to say the Marchesa was impatient---Giulia had

only gasped forth in a choked voice, as she pressed her hand convulsively---

“ It is all over with me, Nice---your uncle ! go ! when you return you shall learn all,” and with this, the Italian was forced to be satisfied for the present.

The servant who had preceded Giulia, had thrown open the door of the Marchesa’s apartment.

“ I wish to speak to the Padre Cellini,” she said, and entering, she found it occupied by the Marchese. The man saying he would acquaint the priest with her Ladyship’s arrival, left them alone. The young Italian looked as much scared when he beheld the entrance of so unexpected a visiter, as if he had seen a ghost. That afternoon a scene had passed between him and his *inamorata*, and he was pacing the apartment, still foaming with the irritation and passion, with which the recollection had influenced his mind. On Giulia’s again murmuring confusedly the name of the priest,

he bowed and left the room, muttering that he would send him to her.

Fra Paolo soon entered, looking more grave and dignified even than was his wont.

His unstable convert had withdrawn herself lately totally from his priestly presence and guidance. She had yielded herself, as he had learnt from his niece, to heretical and carnal dominion. He fixed his terrible glittering eyes upon her with a mixture of severity and mistrust, as he said—

“ What does Lady de Crespigny wish from me ?”

“ She wishes,” was the answer, as Giulia advanced towards him, and sunk at his feet, “ she entreats to be hidden from the world--from shame, sorrow, and contempt. You have told me of abodes where there is peace—where there is safety from the storm of passion, of misery—where in deeds of penitence and devotion, the heart may be calmed—satisfied

even those who were born as it were, to be scorned—trampled upon by the people of the world—even a wretch who has loved with all the intensity of a human heart—yet who has loved in vain. Take me, oh, take me into the convent, instead of Nice. She has hope to bind her to the world. She is beautiful—she may still trust to be loved.”

“ Daughter!” said the priest solemnly, as he gazed on her writhing in agony at his feet, “ I must understand you;—no sudden impulse of passion or worldly disappointment, is sufficient to ensure the constancy of such a determination. I must first understand the circumstances which have at this moment, led you to desire to take so important a step.”

Giulia told all—all her love, her crushed hopes—how not only her love had been betrayed—but that he on whom her affections were placed, had been sued, and sued in vain, to take pity upon her—degrading thought! from which her woman’s

heart recoiled with horror! The priest was eager, bigoted in the cause of religion. No scruples of conscience prevented him from taking advantage of the excitement and weakness of the moment, or of encouraging the desperate designs of the Baroness, to fly at once—to see Claud no more, thereby shewing, that she neither hoped nor expected ought from him—to escape that very night—and take refuge within a convent's walls! for such was now her ardent wish. But he possessed more worldly wisdom than the unhappy girl; he well knew that any such step would give rise to much commotion, and be fraught with new danger to himself, and to his cause.

Lady de Crespigny was not of age, and still under the dominion of guardians. Fra Paolo moreover had no desire to lessen the benefit which might be derived from her conversion, by allowing her to immure herself within the walls of a convent; more good might be pro-

pagated by her remaining in the world. He therefore contented himself at the moment, by commanding and encouraging her holy purposes, endeavouring by all the powers of his mind and tongue to confirm her in her religious tenets, the firm hold of which, could alone gain her admittance into that haven of rest, which she now ardently desired. The priest, to strengthen the influence of his words, appalled her excited fancy, by holding up before her affrighted mind, most awful threatenings of the wrath of offended Heaven, if again she suffered herself to be led away by the snares of the evil one; he bade her return home, and declare openly her recovered faith —her determination, which no earthly guardian could control! He added, that if she still remained firm in her resolution to take upon herself the holy vocation, should she not have been directed by the hand of God, to devote herself in a way more extensively useful to the service of the Holy Mother

Church, then would he joyfully see her cast off the trammels of the world, and devote herself to a life of religious seclusion.

The hours had passed unconsciously away — Giulia had given no orders concerning the carriage, but at about eleven, a servant announced that it was waiting for her. She arose to depart—her head and mind bewildered and confused; the priest dismissed her with a blessing.

“ Go, my daughter!” he said, “ and the saints and holy angels protect your soul and body. It is not without fears and misgivings that I see depart, one, who having proved herself unstable as water, may again be turned, by the first breath of the world; and then, alas! woe to thy poor soul, my daughter !”

“ Fear not, father,” Giulia murmured, as she wrapped her opera cloak around her, “ I have need indeed to cling to the Holy Church, which has the power of offering such a haven

of rest and silence—a refuge which is ever open to a miserable sinner like me, to whom the world must henceforth be a desert —a home where are to be found spiritual comforters like you, to whom I may pour forth a confession of my frailties, and my sorrows; a relief which the religion in which I have been educated, has not to offer.” She then left the room.

Ah, Giulia, who knows what not only a day, but an hour may bring forth? The case of the poor girl, was certainly one which suggests not inappropriately those quaint, but most applicable words of Pope—

“ When the devil was sick, the devil a saint would be,
When the devil was well, the **DEVIL** a saint was he.”

CHAPTER XIII.

“ Though mountains meet not, lovers may
So others do, and so do they ;
The god of love sits on a tree
And laughs that pleasant sight to see.”

DAVISON.

ERE we follow the Baroness to her carriage, we must return to the events which were taking place in Portman Square. In the drawing-room were assembled, sipping their coffee, Mrs. Hamilton, her daughters, and Claud—

Mr. Seymour had also joined them from the dining-room.

It was far from a cheerful party. Claud was most grave and thoughtful, and Mrs. Hamilton's endeavours to be cheerful, and to keep up any conversation, were forced. She glanced uneasily at Gertrude, who sat looking very pretty in a most becoming dress, but with an ill-pleased, unhappy expression of countenance ; the mother's mind was also reverting rather anxiously to a little scene, which had taken place between herself and daughter before dinner, on the subject of Lord Beverley ; still she had not much fear that the perturbed tearful exclamation of—" I will not marry Lord Beverley if he asks me," was called forth by any other feeling than that of pique—of offended pride ! It was impossible that she could possess a daughter as well as a son, so fully, (she styled it) blind to their own welfare.

And Annie, who generally endeavoured by

her own cheerfulness to make up for any lack of it in others, what was the feeling which made *her* look so pale and sad ?

Oh ! weakness of human nature ! how often does it rise up, when least expected—when we fancy we have fought successfully against it, and vanquished the frailty for ever.

The mother's sanguine hopes of Lord Beverley's intentions towards her sister, had made her also credulous upon the subject—but did she rejoice ? How she hated herself—reproached herself for she trembled now the time drew near, when the lost treasure---the love she had for a brief, but never to be forgotten moment, possessed, was to be irrevocably another's.

Mr. Seymour too, he had retired to a distant table, apparently examining a book; his countenance was not visible, but his deep toned voice, as now and then he joined in the scanty talk, was peculiarly melancholy.

The children were flitting about the room, thus in some way enlivening the gloom. The

carriage was announced ; all arose except Gertrude, who still sat holding her coffee cup half full. She did not even lift up her eyes, now fixed vacantly on the ground.

“ Good night, Mr. Seymour---good night, children !” said Mrs. Hamilton kissing the young ones.

“ Gertrude, why are you going to sleep ?” cried Georgie, springing on his sister’s knees to kiss her ; and down went the coffee cup, and its contents upon the delicate dress.

All was consternation ; the maids were summoned---Georgie sent off to bed in disgrace, but Gertrude looking down on her stained and disfigured robe, said with a sigh of relief---

“ I cannot go now !”

“ Oh yes indeed, Gertrude,” said her mother, “ you must go and put on another dress.”

“ No there is not another ready, and—and I will not go to the Opera. unless properly dressed !” she exclaimed petulantly, and she burst into tears.

“ Do not press her to go mother,” said Claud, not liking this little scene to be enacted before his friend, who had advanced at the conclusion of Gertrude’s speech. “ I do not think Gertrude is very well to-night; you and Annie had better go, and if she feels inclined, I will escort her afterwards.”

Mrs. Hamilton was too well bred, and also too indulgent to shew any demonstration of anger at the obstinacy of her daughter; therefore feeling inwardly very much annoyed and provoked, she bade Annie follow her, and telling Claud that he must come with them, as they could not go without a gentleman, entered the carriage.

Gertrude sprang after them and darted up stairs. The young clergyman was left alone. He threw himself into an arm-chair and sighed deeply—mused for a moment, and then began to read—but strange to say, he never turned over a page. The door at length abruptly opened, he started and looked up; it was only

the servants with the tea equipage. They arranged it on the table, placed a chair before it, then made their exit, leaving him again to his own reflections, with the accompaniment of the little silver hissing urn.

A few minutes passed ; then he started up, and made the tea, just as he was accustomed to do in his rooms at Oxford ; his eyes, however, not occupied with the tea-pot, but fixed on the *two* little china cups standing so sociably side by side. This certainly did not look like Oxford ! He then again sat down in his favourite place and tried to read. But no—his eyes were irresistibly fascinated by the same “bits of porcelain.” At length the door slowly opened, and with a sudden effort he riveted his glance earnestly on the book, apparently deeply interested in the study. Then he looked up as if aroused from his abstraction for the first time, by a footstep light as the falling snow.

Mr. Seymour arose, and stood grave and

calm, till Gertrude had advanced to the table, where she seated herself in silence. She was now attired in a simple but pretty morning dress, but her hair still flowing in its usual style, that of Charles the second's beauties. He then also took a chair by the table, and as she did not appear to see anything but the occupation in which she was employed, without rudeness he was able to fix his eyes somewhat earnestly on his companion, to discover perhaps, how far she had recovered from the dire misfortune which had befallen her—how far she was repenting, not having gone to the Opera, or in what proportion the disconsolate Lord Beverley was occupying her thoughts?

But whatever it might be inwardly, the outward effect was certainly most becoming as there she sat, the full red lips half parted with a pettish, bashful smile, probably caused by the remembrance of the little scene of which he had been the witness---the tears he had seen her shed so childishly and of

which he might still discern the traces. Yes! he did see that her cheeks were flushed to the hue of the brightest rose, and that the eyes when the snowy lids were raised, looked like Forget me Nots fresh from the morning dew.

The first break of silence was caused by her having made some mistake in the business of tea making. She had put the sugar into the cream jug instead of the tea cup, and on discovering her mistake she looked up, thinking that he had observed it. She laughed, blushed, then said as she handed him his cup, her little hand trembling as she did so—

“ How I hate crying! it makes me so nervous for a long time after, and puts me in mind of the school-room.”

Had Mr. Seymour also been crying, for his hand was very nearly as tremulous, as he relieved her of the cup?

He made some very inarticulate answer—

said something very common-place, but Gertrude's cheek grew still brighter, and suddenly she arose, left her untasted tea, and went to the piano. She began playing, but in a very desultory and uncertain manner — now a few bars of one tune, now of another. She tried to sing, but that seemed quite as unsatisfactory ; her voice was tremulous and tearful.

“ Oh, I bore you ! I dare say you wish to read, and I have interrupted you,” she exclaimed, rising.

She stood for a moment embarrassed, and then sprang towards the door, as if meditating an escape. Her companion arose. She turned round with a look of alarm ; he was approaching her, with agitation strongly marked upon his countenance — he led her to a seat.

“ For one moment stay,” he murmured, and seated himself by her side. And there she did stay, and for a very long moment — she stayed till a knock and ring broke the thread

of that very long and interesting conversation, and then she fled to her mother's dressing-room to impart to her perchance its substance. And though the arrival proved not Mrs. Hamilton, she remained there awaiting her return, lost in a train of mingled feeling—of joy—not unmixed with doubts—fears and misgivings.

Claud, after seeing his mother and sister settled in their box, had gone to procure them a book of the opera, when on his way back, he encountered Nice and the Marchesa entering the Theatre. They were alone, and the latter having arrested his progress, he could do no less than offer each an arm, and escort them to their box.

Nice accepted it, with an air of quiet humility.

“ I generally have my son as my escort,” said the Marchesa, as Claud led them as rapidly as possible along the gallery, “ but he was not in the humour to-night.

“Poor Filippo,” she continued in her half English accent, and accustomed garrulity, “he is getting tired of this London of yours, Mr. Hamilton—we left him at home sighing for his blue skied Italy.”

“Indeed!” said Claud, in a tone of as much interest as he could command.

“Yes! by the bye, we left your friend, Lady de Crespigny, there also. I was very sorry to be so unpolite as to leave her, but we were just going to the carriage—and she begged us not to wait. I was sorry to see her looking so ill; she was going to have some conversation with—” but they had reached the box, and she cut short the communication.

With a look of sudden grave interest Claud had listened to what was said relating to Giulia—he glanced hastily at Nice, when the Marchesa spoke, the Italian girl also glanced at him, and on her countenance he detected a look of sullen mystery. Claud did not feel inclined to ask her for any further explanation,

so he bowed and left them, and returned to his mother's box.

His seat by Annie was now taken, and he could not ask a few questions he wished to put to her; his mother was also engaged in conversation with some gentleman, though he saw it was not with her usual animation that she was talking.

Claud soon quitted the Theatre, called a coach, and ordered it to drive to Portman Square. He asked of the servant who opened the door, if Lady de Crespigny had returned — she had not.

“What o'clock was her carriage ordered?”

“Her ladyship had given no orders.”

“Was Mr. Hamilton at home?”

“He was in his study,” the man said.

To the study Claud proceeded. His father was seated by a table covered with papers, his head resting on his hand.

“Ah, Claud,” he said, smiling faintly but kindly, as his son gazed gravely on his coun-

tenance. It looked so careworn and harassed as the light of a lamp shewed full upon it. But Claud knew he never liked having such indications observed, and proceeded at once to explain the reason which had brought him there.

“ Father, do you not think this is a very strange proceeding of Giulia de Crespigny’s, going off to Mivart’s, and there remaining, when neither Nice or the Marchesa are at home ?”

“ Why, what do you mean ?” asked his father hastily. “ She cannot be there alone ; is she not at the Opera ?”

Claud then explained—for Mr. Hamilton had not been at home in time for dinner, all the events of the evening, and the Marchesa’s communication.

“ Is it not extraordinary ?” persisted Claud.

“ It is, indeed,” said Mr. Hamilton ; “ I really wish your mother would put a stop

to the great intimacy between Giulia and that odious Italian crew. I have so much to think of just now. But, as to what you have just told me, I can hardly believe it. Why, it is not respectable! The young Italian in the house and all! she must be mad. Ring the bell, Claud. I will order the carriage to be sent for her immediately—but somebody ought to go with it. Really, it is a great nuisance. I suppose I must turn out myself, and I am terribly tired and bored to-night. My dear fellow,” Mr. Hamilton added, “ upon my word, I think I must send you to bring back this errant young lady, and I will have her in when she returns, and enquire into the reason of her strange conduct.”

“ My dear father, do you think that would quite answer? but, at any rate, I can go with the carriage, and see her safe into it. And, let me advise you,” he added, as the carriage having been announced, he was preparing to depart; “ to go to bed, my dear father, and keep your letters for to-morrow.”

Mr. Hamilton nodded — grateful for this little proof of filial consideration, and soon following the advice, he gathered up his papers and went straight to bed — little guessing as he passed the drawing-room, what was passing within it; indeed, he imagined all the family were out; and, as for Mr. Seymour, he had forgotten, for the moment, though he was a great favourite, that such a person was in existence.

CHAPTER IV.

“ Where am I? What soft strain
Passed like a breeze across my burning brain ?”

MRS. HEMANS.

“ Who can, in this short life, afford,
To let such mists a moment stay,
When thus one frank, atoning word,
Like sunshine, melts them all away.”

MOORE.

IN the meantime, Claud had rolled away to Mivart's, ordered the servant to send up to say the carriage was waiting, and was at the door

to hand Giulia in, when she made her appearance.

She passed hastily from the house, wrapped in her cloak, and seemed not to perceive whose was the arm that lent its assistance as she stepped into the carriage.

“Will you allow me a seat, Giulia, within?” Claud said, and without waiting for an answer, he entered.

He had seen by the light of the lamps, that she had turned as pale as death, at the sudden surprise of his appearance---so much so, that he thought she was going to faint and when, after seating himself by her side, he turned to look at her, she was leaning her head—her face averted — against the side of the carriage.

“You are not well, Giulia,” he said, in a grave voice.

“I am not well,” she answered in a low tone, but composed and calm.

“We were surprised,” Claud continued, “at

your remaining here, when Nice and the Marchesa were absent, and were at a loss to imagine what you could find so very attractive in Mivart's, to detain you there."

This was said quite seriously, but in a somewhat nervous tone.

Giulia did not change her position, and only muttered a few unintelligible words which he could not understand.

A silence of a few seconds ensued, and then Giulia lifted up her head and turned towards Claud. Had he been able distinctly to observe her countenance, he would have seen that it was deadly pale, but rigidly calm.

No sister who had vowed a farewell for ever to the world and its affections, could have, with less apparent emotion, looked upon her former lover. She even smiled ; but it had been well if she had left that smile alone, if it were intended to indicate her composure and unconcern. So Claud seemed to think, as a bright light from some lamps shone full upon her

countenance, for he immediately said in a very grave, earnest tone—

“ Tell me, Giulia, for it distresses me to see you thus—what is the matter? What is all this mystery---and what have you been doing all this time?”

“ Doing—doing,” she murmured confusedly, feeling with agony, that all power of control over her feelings was giving way---even her heart, as it were, all—all melting like wax within her. “ Doing !” she continued, desperately, “ I have been providing myself with a home—a refuge !”

“ A home ?” Claud repeated with astonishment.

“ Yes,” she hurried on ; “ I am tired of the world. I have never loved it—and it has never loved me. Why should I remain in it? There are places, where I shall, at least, find that peace which I have long sought in vain. I have been conversing

with a very holy man—he has pointed out the way, and there I am going."

Claud began to fear she had really gone out of her senses. He took her hand.

"Compose yourself, dear Giulia," he said, in the kindest, but most distressed tone, "and tell me calmly—for, am I not one whom you have known from your childhood — one whom I hope you still — love. What is this all about? What can I do to assist you?"

Alas! it was all over with her!—the pressure of his hand on hers --- the soft, low, tender strains! Her whole heart seemed to melt in a passionate burst of tears—her head had fallen on his shoulder. But for an instant only; in the next, she had sprung from him. She again leant, gasping, groaning with shame and agony, against the side of the carriage.

"Whom I hope you love!"

Ah, those words had been mockery!

“Giulia,” said Claud, “may I ask the reason which prompted you to seek that refuge---that home of which you speak? Why is the world so distasteful to you? Are there none in it---not one being whom you would allow to strive to make it less so---whom you would admit as a partaker --- a comforter in your sorrows---who would sympathize in your every feeling.”

“Do not--do not mock me, Claud Hamilton!” was the answer in a voice of agonized emotion---“I require nothing, but that which I shall find within the convent’s walls, I have sworn to enter--and from which, nothing---*nothing* now, can keep me!”

“Nothing, Giulia! say not that!” exclaimed Claud, again soothingly pressing the hand which convulsively grasped her mantle; “but listen to me---to one, who has ever felt for you, affection; and who swears, if, on a future day, you will consent to be his, to devote his life to promote your happiness, and

to endeavour to render the world less dark and joyless. Giulia, do you love me sufficiently to be mine?"

What were Giulia's feelings? Was she dreaming, or were these only mocking words? No, she felt her hand pressed tenderly---she distinguished through the swimming mist in which all else seemed enveloped, his earnest, serious, truthful gaze.

She turned away her head again — one deep sob relieved her heart---but she had determined.

" Giulia, answer me," said Claud, in much agitation; " will you not accept my sincere, though, perhaps you may deem it, presumptuous affection?"

" No, kind, generous, Claud, I will not," was the answer; and these words were uttered in a tone that was calm, gentle--but firm and resolute. They were no vain words. Giulia loved Claud Hamilton at this mo-

ment, more than she had ever yet done ; but she thought not of herself, nor of her own feelings.

“ No, Claud generous--too generous Claud ! I will not accept it,” she repeated.

“ Generous !” exclaimed the young man ; “ say not so, Giulia—on your part will be the generosity.”

And these words were also spoken in sincerity--for Claud did indeed, feel, that the precious gem of genuine, unadulterated love--such as Giulia had to bestow upon him--demanded much gratitude, to atone for the comparatively cold feeling which he, alas ! could only give in return for it. And then, in a worldly point of view ! --- his thoughts flew to that rather galling idea---his poverty, her riches ! There would indeed be, a weight of obligation !

“ Generosity on my part,” she again faltered--“ Alas ! alas !”

But then the thought flashed across her

mind, as to the meaning of these words ; could they refer to her fortune—her position ? and, to her heart, the idea brought a thrill of joy. To think that she had, indeed, the power of bestowing all upon him ! All those advantages, which before, she had ever considered but as mere dross—valueless, how—how did their aspect brighten—as in imagination they were cast at his feet gilding his future path, thus considered, they were treasures indeed !

And with all these worldly advantages, had she not also to bestow upon him—love ? such heartfelt love—exceeding in richness, all the treasures of Golconda ! When his voice again sounded in her ears repeating his suit, perhaps in terms of less ardour and passion, but with sincerity and truth of purpose, of which it were well, that many of the most fervent declarations could boast — in short, when she saw presented to her grasp, the magic draught which was to infuse new

being into her existence — could she have courage to cast it from her, or power to analyse the principle on which it might be offered? — The carriage stopped before the door in Portman Square, and Claud Hamilton handed out his affianced bride.

* * * * *

Mrs. Hamilton could not go to rest until she had learnt from her daughter, all that Lord Beverley had been saying, in the long, earnest conversation, in which he had engaged her almost all the evening. She thought it could be nothing else than that he had chosen her, in despair at the non-appearance of Gertrude, as his confidante, and had made a confession of his love for her sister.

A friend having begged for a seat in the carriage, had prevented Mrs. Hamilton from relieving her curiosity before.

But Annie had flown straight to her room

and shut the door softly, lest she should awaken Gertrude, who she concluded was in her bed asleep.

She had sunk down on a seat—and then, was it grief, agony, was it some sudden and unexpected blow, to every hope of happiness, or some overwhelming prospect of felicity just opened before her, that made her sit for some-time immoveable, as if turned to stone?

She must pardon us, if after recording so lately two scenes of the same nature, we pass over in somewhat a cursory manner the one which had been to her—a life—“a life of wonder and ecstasy!”

She had retired to the back of the box in pitying compliance to a glance—a tone of Lord Beverley’s, in which seemed concentrated every emotion of hope and fear. She was prepared to hear the history of his love for her sister, and with a feeling of resigned misery, had endeavoured to nerve herself to her task of listener.

It was not for some time that she could *believe* that she heard, it was Annie, not Gertrude, Hamilton for whose forgiveness and pity Lord Beverley sued — for whose hand, with humility, and self abasement most sincerely expressed, he entreated.

It was a long confession. He had to tell her how his puerile vanity had caused him to recoil, at the first sight of her altered appearance, and to turn to Gertrude, whose beauty reminded him of what she had been, when first he saw her. He had, he confessed with shame, endeavoured to love her sister, but in vain, he *could* not! He was soon perfectly aware of this fact, but still he felt himself drawn by some irresistible fascination to the house. He had at length discovered what was the secret spell---one which shone on every feature of Annie Hamilton's countenance, beamed in every glance, moved in every gesture, spoke in every tone! He was captive to the power of goodness; sweetness

such as made him even feel his nature changed under its influence. He felt as if his heart were in the keeping of an angel, rather than a woman.

It was to a strain like this she had listened, until she indeed began to feel happiness far too ecstatic for a mortal to bear ; filling her heart even to suffocation. But how had he been answered ? He had been told that he must wait in agonising suspense, for Annie must first discover whether Gertrude had been deceived as well as herself. She must know if her young heart had been wounded, ere she gave her answer. On this answer his fate depended.

If he trembled at the issue of this discovery, no less did her heart beat with agonising dread, to look upon her sister, as if to ascertain from her sleeping face what she so panted to learn, but Gertrude was not in her bed. Annie was surprised at this unexpected occurrence,

and opening the door, as if an impulse led her to seek her sister, she heard sounds of voices issuing from her mother's dressing-room. She listened for a moment, and then proceeded to the room and opened the door.

The scene she beheld, filled her with dismay. Mrs. Hamilton, still attired in her evening-dress, was pacing the room with troubled steps, her voice sounding in mingled tones of distress and displeasure ; whilst Gertrude, her eyes swollen with weeping, her head resting on her hand, sat leaning against a sofa in an attitude of the deepest despair.

“ Oh, Annie, is it you ?” said Mrs. Hamilton, as she turned round on hearing her enter. “ Come in ! you have just arrived in time for me to communicate the most delightful piece of intelligence ; certainly the most satisfactory conclusion to two years of trouble and expense, wasted upon a daughter, with which a mother was ever rewarded.”

Annie approached, and looked upon her

sister with compassionate enquiry; even forgetting for the moment in concern for her apparent distress all that so materially affected herself.

The poor girl sprung forward, threw herself into Annie's arms, and wept, for some moments, in silence.

“Annie,” said Mrs. Hamilton in a softened but troubled voice, “you, I am sure, will not encourage the idea of such utter madness in Gertrude, as even to entertain the remotest idea of marrying Mr. Seymour. Yes, my dear Annie, behold in your sister, the young lady, who might have done so well for herself and family—who had it in her power to marry an earl and forty thousand a year—yes, behold in her, the would-be Mrs. Seymour, who is willing to bury herself for life in a dirty village, to devote herself for ever to the delightful task of dealing out soup to paupers, and teaching dirty children their catechism.”

Poor Gertrude again burst into tears as her

mother thus tauntingly derided the scheme of happiness which she had so lately planned for her future life.

“ My dear mother,” exclaimed the mystified Annie, “ what is the matter?”

“ Only,” answered Mrs. Hamilton with much asperity, “ that Miss Gertrude Hamilton has just informed me, that during our absence she has very obligingly consented to take upon herself the situation of a poor parson’s wife, and hopes for my full approbation of the step. I must say that Mr. Seymour has well requited our hospitality, but, so it is. Really it seems as if my children had conspired to thwart every hope I had formed for their welfare and happiness. Claud! what has he not thrown away? and—and now Gertrude, declares very obediently and dutifully, that even if she never again beholds Mr. Seymour, and if I can help it, she never shall again meet this reverend infatuation—she would rather die a thousand deaths than marry Lord Be-

verley, who has been encouraged for her sake alone, and of whose intentions and hopes ,you, Annie can relate, after your long, confidential conversation with him this evening.”

Annie recalled to remembrance by the mention of Lord Beverley’s name, with burning cheeks and faltering voice, exclaimed,

“ Gertrude could never have married Lord Beverley, mama ! we have all been deceived.”

“ Deceived !” echoed Mrs. Hamilton hastily
“ what do you mean, Annie ?”

“ I mean, mama—because—he has—proposed to me—”

It is needless to detail all that followed this communication—the surprise was almost too great at first for belief, or for the realization of the idea—and the relief of poor Gertrude, whose offences were forgotten for the moment, in the new and overwhelming excitement.

The first access of joy had scarcely subsided, when the door was gently opened, and Claud entered. He gazed for a moment on

the scene before him—his mother seated, with Annie kneeling by her side, half weeping, half laughing, as questions and answers were bandied between them; Gertrude standing by with swollen eyes and bewildered countenance.

Claud was puzzled to tell whether it was from grief or joy, that his relations were suffering.

Mrs. Hamilton looking towards him, exclaimed,

“ Come in, Claud—you may well look mystified—but no! you had better have staid away—the sight of you almost takes away the pleasure with which I introduce your sister Annie to you, as the future Countess of Beverley.”

Annie was clasped in her brother’s arms.

“ Nay,” exclaimed her mother, “ you had better congratulate your other sister,” and Claud turned to look at Gertrude, who flew to him and wept upon his bosom.

“ Yes! her brilliant ideas will be much more in your line. She will tell you that your *very good* friend Seymour has been filling her mind with nonsense, which I trust she will have forgotten by to-morrow.” But Claud already had seen his friend, and been enlisted into his cause.

“ Mother!” he said, “ I think when you have enquired more into Seymour’s prospects, you will not consider the step he has taken so very unpardonable, and that you will hesitate before you give a decided veto against making him and dear Gertrude happy. Shall you not be content with having an Earl and a Baroness added to your family?”

“ A Baroness! yes, Claud,” she interrupted quickly, “ if *that* had been the case—even Mr. Seymour might have been pardoned.”

“ You promise that, mother!” Claud interrupted, “ well, dear Gertrude, cheer up; for, mother, I have proposed, and have been accepted, by the Baroness de Crespigny!”

CHAPTER XV.

“ In a brave old house dwells Magdalene,
* * * *
I trained thee in this sober wise,
And in this solitude,
That thou might’st grow up innocent
Thoughtful, and wise, and good.
* * * * *
Oh, for a loving sister,
To worship at my side !”

MARY HOWITT.

A year and a half had elapsed since the preceding events happened. Shirley Hall had been the constant abode of Lady de Cres-

pigny, and it was not till early in the spring completing that period, that she had left it, for the metropolis, summoned there by her guardian on matters of business attendant on her majority. This event seemed, as in reality it proved, the breaking up of a long, monotonous calm; similar to that in which the occupants of the old mansion passed their existence, ere Giulia, launching into society, brought with that event the consequent interruptions and changes. The same party were assembled at Shirley Hall, and with the exception of occasional visits from the different members of the Hamilton family, nothing more momentous had changed the aspect of its affairs. One of the party had however returned at the commencement of the period we have mentioned, (as she really experienced at that moment,) with a new existence infused into her soul. She had felt, as it were, her visioned cup of happiness realized; happiness of which mortals may dream, but which seldom they are allowed to

taste. She had returned to exist on the remembrance of the image of its delights, and to revel in anticipations of a bright future. And those who saw, without knowing the secret of this new influence—for her engagement, with the exception of Mrs. Gordon, and the old servants, upon whom she could rely, she had requested, should not as yet be publicly declared---marvelled to note the new light beaming in the eye, the altered step, nay tone of voice, of the once grave, joyless young Baroness.

She seemed to wish to shew affection to her aunt, whom she found ready to rejoice with her in her joy; she was anxious to evince towards her, gratitude for all that she had done for her in her distress, and by Mrs. Gordon's advice Giulia had promised, during those two years of probation, to endeavour to strengthen and improve, by profitable study, the mind which had so long been wavering and tossed—unsettled by the unhealthy and weakening

tide of an ill-directed imagination---without such improvement her aunt plainly but affectionately warned her, that she feared the capability of her disposition, ever to find full and pure happiness in any lot of life whatever!

But alas! how can the mind for any length of time recover its healthy tone, how can noxious feeling die away from the heart, when round it has wreathed a serpent, silently and secretly stinging every evil passion into life, feeding and nourishing them with its poison. By Giulia's side might again be seen following her foot-steps continually, her bane---her destiny---the Italian girl Nice! not the arrogant---the fierce spirit which she had for a while enacted in London, but far more dangerous, the humble and unobtrusive friend—

“ For he
Must serve who fain would sway and soothe
And sue
And watch all time.”

This Nice knew full well ; her heart had grown

very old and wise since last she parted from Shirley's gloomy walls, although even then, it possessed age and wisdom far beyond her years.

It may perhaps seem strange that Claud Hamilton should have departed without expressing a wish that his future wife would cease to retain about her person, one whom he so particularly disliked and mistrusted.

He had spoken to his mother upon the subject, without however hinting to her the principal cause of the prejudice he felt against the girl; he was far too generous to breathe a hint of the obvious designs which she had upon his heart. However, on witnessing the grief and dismay of his *fiancée*, gently and with resignation expressed, at the idea of having to deprive her poor friend of the only asylum she had on earth, he had not the firmness to be obdurate ; and so near to the moment of their parting, it was impossible to enforce the point ; indeed he felt unequal to any great

effort, for he suffered much from the state of nervous anxiety in which he had for some time been existing. There had been no opposition on Fra Paolo's part to Nice's return to Shirley Hall, for he and his niece had come to a perfect understanding upon all matters with each other, as had also the Italian girl, with the young Marchese ; though it had required all the wily craftiness which she so abundantly possessed, to keep within bounds his ardent passion, and also to retain him as a tool, in case of any future necessity or extremity. Thus did this subtle girl contrive to arrange everything according to her desires.

And Francesca, the little heroine of the remaining portion of our story, now no longer the child in years, though scarcely less so in appearance and in guilelessness of heart. She had been reared for the last six years in solitude profound, but with judicious care and tenderness; with all that was healthful both for body and

mind, liberty and exercise ; all that was lovely and good had been instilled into her young heart ; and she desired as yet no new enjoyments added to those of her childhood, but such as were discovered by her expanding faculties. Still Mrs. Gordon, whilst she trusted in Him, whose beneficent hand had formed this lovely creature---to preserve her, if it so pleased His allwise will, in goodness and innocence, could not forbear a sigh of dread, as time rolled on, and she knew that soon the breath of the world must breathe on her sweet flower ; and a fear trembled at her heart, lest perchance she had by her care rendered it too delicate in its purity to withstand the buffettings of that rude blast. How would she fare without her hand to direct and guide her over the waves of that troubled sea ?

“ But,” she thought, “ the Lord will provide who tempers the wind to the shorn lamb.”

How little did the good aunt imagine in what

manner that faithful prayer was to be fulfilled, or all that would transpire, to prove and try the young heart she had helped to form.

Francesca at sixteen, we may now picture to ourselves seated in the dismal old library, where we first met her, sporting in all the fullness of her childish glee. It is the day on which her sister is expected home, and now and then she lifts up her beautiful face from the book she is studying, to listen, as some sound falls upon her ear, which might be mistaken for that of carriage wheels. Still there were none of those signs of eager expectation which might have been looked for, on a face redolent with warm and lively feeling, whilst awaiting the return of an only sister. Alas! even the warmest and most lively of hearts, must begin sooner or later to feel the chilling effects of coldness and constraint!—and poor Francesca had often of late asked her aunt with tears in her eyes, why it was that her sister did not seem to love her as she would

fain be loved by her—why it seemed such an effort to answer her expressions of affection—why it was as she observed, that Giulia's countenance appeared so gloomy when she looked upon her, and that she would even shrink from her embrace?

Francesca began to perceive and to feel all this. As a child she had often expressed something of the same sort of feeling—but then when her affection met with any repulse, she would soon allay the little pang it caused her, by turning to some other and lighter subject; and Giulia on seeing the little arms from which she had coldly extricated herself, the next instant with a merry laugh, cast round the dog Hector's neck, had often observed with a bitter smile—

“ See how little it matters to Francesca, on whom her caresses are lavished !”

Even now the young girl would often endeavour to turn off, by some little playful device of her brain, some mortification re-

ceived from the hand of Giulia—but now it was more difficult to forget it. It was so strange, she thought, to have an only sister and not to be able to feel towards her as a companion and friend. She knew Giulia was very wise—very clever, for Francesca was taught to look up to her sister with great respect and consideration. Perhaps she thought that it was her own deficiencies and inferiority which estranged Giulia's heart; but still she was her sister, and she might love her notwithstanding.

Mrs. Gordon would endeavour to comfort her, by saying that some people were less demonstrative in their affection than others; and Francesca—with that sweet spirit which “thinketh no evil—” would gladly comfort herself with this belief.

But still love cannot retain all its free confidence, when a chill is for ever being cast upon it; but she daily evinced more respect to her sister's wishes and opinions---for Giulia's

dignity and self-confidence had of late much increased--although her demonstrations of frank affection certainly were more than ever constrained. In the library then Francesca now sat on one of its massive chairs, Hector on one side occasionally lifting up his large head to lick the little hand which hung somewhat listlessly over his head, Arno still sprightly and gay playing with the tiny foot swinging gently about for his amusement; the only sport which for the present his mistress was in the mood to provide for him.

Mrs. Gordon was also reading in the same room. She had that day been giving her young niece a little lecture, from which she was now striving to shew her aunt she intended to benefit.

The aunt had said—

“ Dear Francesca, I fear you are not very fond of reading, indeed of study of any kind.”

“ Oh yes, dear aunt, I assure you you are

mistaken. I could study for ever with you; my lessons are as amusing to me as anything I do; why, dearest aunt do you think so? because I laugh and am merry all the time?"

"No, Francesca, I do not allude to that—but you are becoming too old for what you call lessons—at sixteen, young ladies are expected to have done with them; but, unless they have imbibed some taste for carrying on their studies by themselves, I fear their minds do not long retain any benefit from what they have before learnt.—Now you, dearest, should endeavour to cultivate that taste; you will discover its value some day, when your little head and mind grow older, and begin to require somewhat more substantial food than birds and flowers."

So Francesca, with great gravity and sedateness, had forthwith, begun a daily course of reading in the library, independent of her studies in the school-room up-stairs; and, if there happened to be any one in the room, to

whom she could occasionally chat, and thus break the awful gloom surrounding her, she did not much dislike the occupation. But she could not entirely follow Giulia's example. How much more clever she must be, to be able to sit without reluctance, for hours together without lifting her eyes from some musty old volume ! She thanked her stars, her aunt did not choose such books for her reading.

It would have formed a pretty group for a painter—that child-like looking student and her two canine companions by her side ; the dark curls hanging over the back of the oaken chair from the face, whose natural, animated loveliness, was prettily blended with the look of serious attention, which ever and anon contracted her fair brow — the subdued light shining through the high stained windows, throwing upon the whole, a kind of Rembrandt effect. Mrs. Gordon, as she sat and gazed upon it occasionally from her book, longed for

an artist's pencil to seize the aspect of the moment.

It was a very gusty afternoon, and the wind, which, indeed, seemed ever partial to that old mansion — generally finding some excuse for creeping about its walls, to steal in and whistle along its passages and corridors, had so often deceived Francesca and her companion, with the idea that it was the carriage, that they had determined to be dupes no more.

The library windows too were on another side of the house not looking upon the entrance—therefore, the expected carriage did, at length, draw up to the door without being heard by Mrs. Gordon and her niece. The servants were ready to receive their young lady, therefore no bell was rung. It was not till the library door opened and Giulia made her appearance, that her arrival was ascertained.

Francesca sprang up to meet her sister—

who, after receiving her embrace, and that of her aunt, turned to look towards the door, saying, somewhat formally,

“ Francesca, dear — your guardian !” and Francesca, darting forward with an exclamation of joy, to meet, as she supposed, Mr. Hamilton, had nearly thrown herself into the arms of the stranger—who, at the same moment, made his appearance at the door, and bending his stately head, entered.

As quickly did Francesca spring backwards ; blushing and astonished, she stood, for an instant, gazing upwards ; something stronger, however, than bashfulness, riveting her clear, full, liquid eyes, upon that unknown visiter’s face, while he bent his eagle eye keenly upon the little fairy form before him, ere he advanced any further.

“ Colonel Vavasour, let me introduce you to my sister, and also to my aunt, Mrs. Gordon,” repeated Giulia, and Colonel Vavasour then stepped forward, bowed courteously and res-

pectfully to the elder lady and presented his left hand to Francesca--the right arm was suspended in a sling---then said--

“ Miss De Crespigny, your sister has been so kind, as to allow me to accompany her, and make my acquaintance with the ward, over whom, I may yet, have the pleasure of claiming authority as guardian--though, I am so unfortunate as to arrive only in time to surrender up my rights to that office towards herself.”

Francesca smiled, but bent her eyes to the ground--a slight sensation of awe stealing over her mind--somewhat of the same kind of feeling as that excited in her heart in earlier days, by the threat that her fierce, warlike guardian, should be summoned to keep her in order.

But it was not assimilating the person before her, with any such fearful attributes which now called forth that awe; rather was it the softening of that deep, commanding

voice—the gracious dignity with which he bent his proud glance upon her, which made the young girl feel herself so *very little*—as much, as if she stood in the presence of some superior kind of being to those she had before seen. He was the first who had ever awokened such sentiments of veneration—for so they might be termed—in Francesca's heart—she, whose warm, open disposition, had been from infancy, until now, more open to love, than to that description of fear, which ever accompanies the kind of impression inspired by the presence of her new guardian.

It was strange for Francesca to feel thus—and when Colonel Vavasour, after a little more conversation, dropped the little trembling hand, and turned to speak to Mrs. Gordon, she took courage to survey more accurately the being who thus had affected her. And the survey seemed to have been most satisfactory, and to have reassured her that he was after all but a human being like herself,

though very very high above her, in every way ; and she was soon able, though perhaps with a little more timidity than was her wont, to smile and talk sweetly and gaily with her guardian.

Walter Scott's description of the renowned Scottish hero will afford the best portrait we can give of our English warrior.—

“ His stature manly, bold and tall
Built like a castle's battled wall
Yet moulded in such just degrees
His giant strength seems lightsome ease,
Close as the tendrils of the vine
His locks upon his forehead twine.

Weather and war their rougher trace
Have left on that majestic face
But his dignity of eye !—
There as a suppliant I would fly
Secure mid danger wrong and grief
Of sympathy, redress, relief.
That glance if guilty I would dread
More than the doom that spoke me dead.”

CHAPTER XVI.

“ Soldier rest ! thy warfare o'er
Sleep the sleep that knows not breaking
Dream of battle fields no more,
Days of danger, nights of waking.”

SCOTT.

All up and down the galleries
Went the Lady Magdalene,
A—looking at the pictures old,
That on the walls were seen.”

COLONEL VAVASOUR, who we now for the first time introduce to our readers, after spending his youth in foreign wars, and winning for

himself an early name for unexampled bravery and valour, had at length been forced, having received a severe wound which incapacitated him for further service at present, to avail himself of leave to return home with despatches.

He had found it necessary on his arrival in London, to put himself for a month under surgical treatment; and it was at the conclusion of that period, that he met at Mrs. Hamilton's house, his former ward, Lady de Crespigny, and was able to take his part in the business attendant upon her coming of age.

Notwithstanding the lapse of years and the rude tumultuous scenes through which he had passed, he was far from having lost his interest in the remembrance of the romantic friendship of the late Lord de Crespigny, on his sojourn in that fair Italian Palazzo, surrounded by everything that was luxurious and beautiful; his eccentric but talented host, and his dark-eyed most beautiful wife—even the children were present to his memory, and the arch con-

fessor who had not failed to attempt the conversion of the youthful soldier, as he lay upon a bed of weakness and suffering.

All these remembrances often floated upon his imagination like a sunny dream, rather than reality—and now on meeting with Giulia, the recollection was more vividly revived, and with all the gratifying reflection of the impression which he felt he must have made upon his friends, to have caused him thus to be chosen by them as guardian to their children. His interest in the past seemed to revive, on thus again seeing the child of these interesting persons, as if the events of late years had been the occurrence of yesterday ; and on his expressing anxiety to become acquainted with the daughter of his confiding friend, Mr. Hamilton had himself proposed to Giulia that she should invite Colonel Vavasour to return with her to Shirley Hall, and he readily accepted the invitation.

It must have seemed a strange contrast, the

gloom and quiet of that old mansion, to the warrior so long accustomed to the noise of camps and battle-fields, and still more the change of companions, from the rude and war-like, to the fair and gentle ones amongst whom he now found himself domesticated.

As strange also to the inhabitants of Shirley was it to find such a guest within its walls. He seemed, as it were, to revive the dignity of the old place—to restore it to the time when the owners of the old war apparel, now hanging in the armoury, had walked through its stately apartments, or feasted in its Hall.

And pride and pleasure glistened in every eye, from the highest to the lowest, as their gallant guest was seen parading, with his firm, martial step, the spacious hall or galleries, with the young Baroness, perhaps, walking on one side, grave and sedate, and Francesca, rather flitting than walking, like a very Titania on the other; and often the wish was breathed, or even expressed, that the head of

the house of De Crespigny should wed with one so fitted to enoble and beautify its race. Those who were not in the secret of her prior engagement, would even please to interpret the grave, respectful attention bestowed upon his young hostess, as symptoms favourable to their wishes. However it might be, day after day the Colonel lingered, week after week; Mrs. Gordon and Mrs. Rivers proved such skilful nurses that his wounded arm was progressing fast, and he found no necessity as he had at first apprehended of soon returning to London. Even Mrs. Rivers' countenance wore a less sombre, frigid aspect since the arrival of a guest of whom she so much approved.

Francesca's morning studies, with her aunt, were now somewhat interrupted, for her guardian seemed greatly to prefer the school-room in the gallery, to the solemn library where he was expected to pass his mornings. It was certainly the most cheerful apartment in the

house—because more lightly furnished—and birds, flowers, and such signs of youthful taste were there to enliven it; and then though he always begged that he might not disturb them and would sit down very quietly to listen to what was going on, was it possible that Francesca could proceed with her abstruse lesson, with her awful guardian watching her so keenly with his imposing hazel eye? Generally the tables were turned upon him, by his being called upon to relate some anecdote connected with the study she might be at that moment pursuing. And then her afternoon readings in the library! they were not so perfectly uninterrupted—for Colonel Vavasour was generally writing letters or reading pamphlets, and he would often turn his chair round with a quick sudden movement, and look at her, as if to ascertain what she was about, or startled her and caused her to look up blushing and frightened—and she always felt, as it were, nervous, expecting this manœuvre. Why did

he not do the same to Giulia or Nice? mused Francesca. Thus the time passed, till the rainy February and the windy March were fast drawing to a close, and then the Colonel began a sort of offer, rather than a proposal, to depart. He was ashamed to have so long trespassed on their hospitality! But the Baroness expressed her hope that he would not consider himself on such ceremonious terms with her and his ward, as to think it necessary to depart, ere he was quite tired of Shirley and its inmates. Mrs. Gordon would kindly express her opinion that the extreme quiet of the life he was now obliged to lead, was very essential to the perfect restoration of his health after the fatigues and accidents of war; and Francesca would exclaim against his departing just as the trees and flowers would be coming out, and when he could see that light and sunbeam could really find their way into the dear old house, which he had only beheld under the influence of rain, wind and gloom.

“ But we had better not ask him to stay,” she would exclaim as he shook his head with a hesitating, dubious smile, “ I know it makes him very sad to walk along the galleries, and look at the pictures of warriors in their armour and lances. I know he is longing to be off,” and as she flitted away with an arch, merry laugh, Colonel Vavasour’s eyes would follow her with a certain, sad, grave expression —then he would pace up and down with impatient steps and thoughtful brow—but still he staid !

Nice had become singularly quiet and unobtrusive. In the meek girl who now seemed to shrink into obscurity, who would have recognised the fierce Nice in London, swaying imperiously her weak friend, and Italian lover, and as imperiously demanding, as it were, the surrender of the heart of one whom even her power could not subdue ?

So well did she assume this semblance that Colonel Vavasour had not even remarked the

usually striking effect of those peculiar eyes, nor indeed noted her much at all, save in acts of common kindness and courtesy, for as there are spells which for a time can cause the serpent of the field to hide his sting, so there is a power vested in some superior natures, before which an evil heart will shrink, and in that presence veil their very feeling. How little did Colonel Vavasour imagine that in the form of the seemingly bashful, humble, inoffensive girl, a venomous reptile was crawling in his path, from the effects of whose sting he should one day so deeply suffer, or that she would prove the chief instrument, in bringing so speedily and suddenly to an active reality, that idea which had but crossed his heart and brain, as a beauteous meteoric phantom which sometimes allures the wisest imagination ; oh ! often would he impatiently condemn his judgment, for weakly pursuing this vision of bliss ! But so it was with the Italian girl—in

“Silence but not submission in his lair,
Fixed passion holds his breath.”

And from thence it is able with clearness and calmness to plan and foresee all that is required, to prepare for that hour,

“Which shall atone for years
* * * * *
The power
To punish!”

Thus warred the passions of the unhappy Nice. Her views were extending—her ambition expanding beneath the glassy calm. The noble, the great, the pure, the innocent, the weak, must all be made her tools if so required. Her heart had truly become the seat of that evil one who “goeth about seeking whom he may devour,” sad but not unparalleled example of the extent of deformity, to which unbridled passion can turn an unprincipled and naturally fiery breast.

Francesca had not been very well lately—her watchful aunt remarked a languor in her eye, a look of greater thought upon her brow,

less elasticity in her movements, symptoms which from a child generally indicate tokens of indisposition.

There was also a nervousness and inequality in her temper; one moment she would give way to wild merriment, the next, tears gushed forth at a word, a look, which in the slightest manner jarred upon her feelings.

Mrs. Gordon, although she was ever anxious to conceal every display of over anxiety, was easily alarmed by any such symptoms in her idolized charge. There was something so delicately fragile in Francesca's appearance, so peculiar in her disposition, that even though she appeared to possess much strength of constitution, Mrs. Gordon was always uneasy at any such fluctuations of health and spirits.

And on this occasion, (she knew not why,) she felt a sudden, it seemed to her, almost an ominous dread. She would not allow Francesca to study; she lavished on her sweet

favorite, more than usual affection, watchfulness and indulgence.

It was an early day in April, that the events, about to be related, occurred. Of the light and sunshine that Francesca had promised this season should bring, the commencement of the month was certainly not a specimen, for a more dreary April could not have occurred to encrease the usual gloom of the old, dismal hall.

The aspect of the weather seemed on this day to extend its influence over the spirits of its inmates. There were no livelier sounds heard during that long afternoon, mingling with the storm without, than the solemn tone of the organ, awakened by Lady de Crespigny, tones which seemed struck in accordance with the feelings of increasing gloom which might be observed in her countenance. And what had called them forth?

Alas! but the old story—these few words in a letter from her betrothed.

“ Is sweet little Francesca as beautiful as ever ? ”

This sentence had stamped the day as wretched.

But her friend was ever by her side, and much sympathy and confidence were exchanged between them.

Francesca also was in a fitful mood. She was with her aunt almost all the day. Now and then she would start off as was her wont on such rainy days, flitting far and near about the house, but soon again she would once more be gliding back to seat herself languid and listlessly by Mrs. Gordon’s side.

Colonel Vavasour also seemed to feel the day more tedious than he had ever yet done—he did not appear able to settle to any occupation—he also, would set out on excursions over the rambling old mansion, but, as if weary of such exercise, would soon return, and not finding much to say to his hostess and her friend---the only two of the party who gave

him much of their society that day—he frequently sunk into a reverie, with his eyes fixed on the grim warrior above the mantel-piece, dreaming it might be imagined of

“Battle, sieges,
Of moving accidents, by flood and field,
Of hair breadth scrapes in the immovable dead breach,
&c., &c., &c.

They all, however, met at dinner; and when that somewhat grave, and silent meal was over, Colonel Vavasour had sat a few minutes after his fair companions, then strolled up the old stone stair-case into the picture gallery.

He looked around somewhat eagerly, but saw nought but the tall, stiff figure of Mrs. Rivers, who, with a ponderous bunch of keys in her hand, stood as if she had been engaged in conversation with some one near her.

“Good evening, Mrs. Rivers,” Colonel Va-

vasour said, with a gracious bend of his stately head ; “ we seem, at last, to have a prospect of fine weather,” the sun was setting on a fine, clear evening ; “ how well the pictures look by this light ! By-the-bye, there is one which I hardly ever observed before. I wonder it is not placed in a better light—the face is so beautiful—it is scarcely seen here. Whom does it represent ?” And Colonel Vavasour walked up to a corner of the gallery where hung the portrait of a lady, apparently very young and beautiful, dressed in a sort of masquerade costume.

“ I have often wondered,” he continued, in a kind of half soliloquy, “ from whence your young lady derived her peculiar style of diminutive loveliness — her parents both so tall ! but I never saw so striking a likeness as this ancestress of hers.”

“ I ever thought so,” said the old lady, in a low, grave tone ; “ but,” she continued, shaking her head mysteriously, “ Heaven forfend !”

“ Oh ! Colonel Vavasour !” interrupted a little voice, which, coming suddenly and unexpectedly as it did, from the recess of one of the long, narrow windows, lighting each extremity of the gallery, caused the brave warrior, by whom cannon balls had whizzed past unheeded, to start and to change colour.

“ Do, Colonel Vavasour, make her tell you something about that poor lady, who is put into the corner. I shall be more curious than ever, now you think she is like me ; but Mrs. Rivers is so mysterious about her, and says it will be time for me to know her history when I am married — but that will be so very long a time ! And, am I really like her ?” she exclaimed, rising from the window-seat, where she had been sitting to exhale the fresh evening air, breathing through its open lattice ; and approaching the picture with a scrutinizing smile,

“I am very glad, for I think she is very pretty and merry-looking. I would rather—much rather be like her in every respect, than resemble those demure-looking ladies around her.”

“Miss Francesca, you know not what you say,” interposed Mrs. Rivers, with severity; “there is such a thing as fair and foul; wantonness and smiles, where there should be tears and penitence — tinsel and finery, where there ought to be sack-cloth and ashes.”

Colonel Vavasour looked at the dismayed countenance of the innocent Francesca with a smile, and glanced at the picture with still greater interest. Nice at this moment entered the gallery, but after saying a few words in a low tone to Francesca, who approached to meet her, she disappeared.

“You are not going, Miss de Cressigny?” said Colonel Vavasour, quickly,

as he perceived his ward somewhat slowly preparing to follow her.

“ Yes,” she answered, turning round her head for a moment, “ Giulia wants me,” and she walked away.

CHAPTER XVII.

“ The warrior’s heart when touched by me,
Can as downy, soft, and as yielding be,
As his own white plume, that high amid death,
Through the field has shone—yet moves with a breath.”

LALLA ROOKH.

FRANCESCA went immediately to the library, for there Nice had, with somewhat of harsh authority in her tone, ordered her to attend her sister.

This peculiar tone, the Italian seemed to

have a delight in using towards Francesca, whenever an opportunity occurred, which she could decently seize for the display of her power; it appeared as if she longed to throw her toils over one, who, hitherto, had ever been shielded from her arts, as if by some invisible spell.

The two friends were seated side by side when she entered, and Giulia turning towards her, said with a somewhat grave and solemn expression---

“ Francesca, do you not think it would be better for you to come here and sit with us, instead of wandering about the house all the evening with Colonel Vavasour ?”

“ I was only in the gallery with Colonel Vavasour, Giulia,” Francesca replied, in a tone of some surprise.

“ Yes; I am aware of that,” her sister answered, still more solemnly; “ but I dare say, Colonel Vavasour does not require your attendance; and, as you are no longer a child, *we*

think it were as well, that you should acquire more regular habits, and be more like other people. Young ladies of sixteen generally prefer reading or working, to following the guests about like a child."

Poor Francesca sat down in silence, for a feeling she had never before experienced arose in her heart, choked her voice, and prevented her from uttering the words which rose to her lips, when the sentence, "as *we* have been thinking," accompanied by a glance from her sister towards Nice, sounded offensively on her ear; words, which to judge by the momentary flash which turned the violet softness of Francesca's eyes into the "Sapphire's blaze," were such as the old fanciful poet might well have sworn to be of a nature, to oblige the teeth of that little mouth to break,

" That they might passage get."

but they died away in silence and the big tears

gathered, and quenched the momentary gleam of anger.

Alas ! the poor little girl ! there was no need to remind her of her departing childhood ; she had already felt what she supposed must be the forerunner of grown up years---a depression --indefinable wishes beyond the childish fancies which had so long satisfied her ; altogether she began to think it must be a very miserable thing to be a woman. And now to be so sternly reminded of her misfortune, and worse than all to experience shame and mortified pride, called forth by the implied reproof of “ following Colonel Vavasour !”

Following him ! had she not been reproaching herself only that very day, for the silly feeling which made her run away when she heard his step or voice.

She sat for some time twisting some silk she had hastily taken up, till she had sufficiently recovered her composure to feel that

the ominous gloom of the party which she had been so peremptorily summoned to join, was not at all agreeable. To break the stillness she endeavoured to talk to Giulia, who however gave her no great encouragement to persevere, and then she had recourse to Arno.

The library was becoming so obscure and sombre, and Nice so disagreeably inclined to fix her eyes upon her! This evening was the first time she had ever minded who looked at her, and she particularly felt the effect of the peculiar gaze of “the glittering eye;” so at length saying, it was too dark for work, and that she must go and see her aunt Gordon, who was suffering from a head-ache, and had retired to her own apartment, the young girl left the room.

In the mean time Colonel Vavasour had been left *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Rivers. Her original eccentricity greatly interested him, and this evening, finding the old lady in a more communicative mood than usual, he encouraged her to talk on various subjects relating to the

old house, and the state of preservation in which under her superintendence it had retained its ancient relics.

The armour was at length their theme, and becoming eloquent on a subject in which Colonel Vavasour entered *con amore*, it ended by their going to inspect an entire suit, the last, worn by a Baron of the house, and which having only that day been newly cleaned and furbished in the old armoury, had, just before his entrance, been replaced in the gallery, where it was allowed to stand alone, like the guardian of the mansion.

A venerable man, his back bowed with years, came tottering in, as they were thus engaged, in order to restore some part of the armour which had become unfastened. It had long been his office to clean the various accoutrements, though now growing too old to do aught but assist in performing a few easy tasks.

The old man was one of the few remaining

ancient retainers of the family. His grey eyes lighted up, after performing the business for which he had come, and he turned them upon the noble form of the hero by his side---then encouraged by a few kind words from Colonel Vavasour, rubbing his hands with a low, pleased chuckle, he said, looking first at Mrs. Rivers, and then from the Colonel to the armour—

“ Yes, he’s just right—just a fit, as Miss Francesca was saying.”

“ What are you talking about, old Davie?” exclaimed Mrs. Rivers somewhat sternly, seeing Colonel Vavasour look astonished at this outbreak. “ He is thinking of some years ago, sir,” she continued in an apologetic voice, “ when I hindered Mr. Claud Hamilton from dressing up in this suit, as he was about to do, for the amusement of Miss Francesca; and my preventing the scheme was a great disappointment to the young lady who was not much used to be crossed in her little whims—

but it was not on striplings such as he--though he was in truth a fine lad---that I wished to see that armour."

Colonel Vavasour began to examine more minutely the fastenings and joinings of the suit—the old man eagerly following his movements with his keen eyes.

"Do you think," he said, in a somewhat hesitating tone, "that Miss de Crespigny would really now care about seeing the effect of the armour when worn by any one; for I shall be happy some day to—"

"Would she? Wouldn't she?" chuckled old Davie, rubbing his hands joyfully, "why she came in to-day and caught me rubbing it up, and 'Davie,' she says to me, 'I would give worlds to see that tall, handsome soldier we have here,' (I beg your pardon, sir, but I tell you her own words,) 'dressed up in that suit—Mrs. Rivers would not call him a strippling, I suppose?' and then she quite sighed about it. Oh! she's one that should never

have to sigh ; that is if I could help it," and he looked quite reproachfully at the Colonel. " See, sir, it is the most handy thing in the world—done in a minute."

In short the old man gained his point. Colonel Vavasour's servant, a stout veteran soldier, was summoned, and with great zest assisted to equip his master ; and soon, in the now faint light of the gallery, stood in complete armour with lance in hand, as majestic looking a warrior as ever trod a battle field in England's olden days.

Old Davie, after feasting his eyes upon him for a few minutes, followed the servant, chuckling and rubbing his hands at the idea of the treat he had gained for his dear little Miss Francie ; and Mrs. Rivers left the gallery to summon the ladies.

She met Francesca at the foot of the stairs coming from the library, and with a face of importance bid her go to the gallery, where she would behold something worth looking at.

With all the eager curiosity of a child, the young lady flew up stairs, and Colonel Vavasour, as he stood on the same spot which the empty armour had before occupied, with a conscious smile at the thought of his novel position of thus masquerading for the amusement of a girl, saw Francesca bound into the gallery, and gaze eagerly round with her brilliant, animated eye.

He advanced a few steps, her eyes turned upon him with a wild stare of astonishment, and then with a faint cry, she sprang forward and was kneeling at his feet—her hands clasped, her head thrown back, and her face raised towards his, with an expression it was difficult accurately to define. It was scarcely like fear—scarcely admiration which lighted up her pale countenance; for the moment she remained immovable in this attitude; she was like one “breathless with adoration.”

Colonel Vavasour bent down a look upon

her, (for his visor was raised,) in which there was no such ambiguity—it was unmixed admiration. Admiration! oh! far too cold a phrase to describe that glance. He fancied however that what he saw, was but the most perfect piece of pretty playful acting imaginable, and with the intention of carrying on the pageant he had in sport commenced, he raised high his gauntleted hands and held the lance in a threatening gesture above her head. But then the little hands gradually unclasped, and Francesca sunk gently forwards and lay prostrate at his feet.

This could scarcely be acting.

“ Francesca!” Colonel Vavasour exclaimed in a lower, softer tone than ever conqueror called on a prostrate foe.

This was all he said, but it expressed much. Never before had he called her by that name!

She had often wondered at the gentle, but almost ceremonious respect observed in his

deportment towards herself by one so superior---she who, by every one else, was treated but as a child. At this moment, however, she noticed not the change.

Colonel Vavasour cast aside the lance and cumbrous gauntlets, and lifted Francesca from the ground, but her eyes were closed---her face was white as the purest marble. He held her in his arms like a child --- her dark hair floated over his mailed shoulder, as her drooping head rested upon his breast --- her slender arms hung listless by his side.

A bold, strong heart beat within that steel breast-plate, but all the tenderness of a woman seemed, at that moment, to gush into his heart; that eagle eye was moistened by a tear, and with an irresolute impulse, he strained his young ward to his heart, and pressed his lips on her fair, innocent brow.

When he again raised his head, they were

not alone. The Baroness and Nice were standing at a few paces distant---their eyes fixed upon him. Perhaps Colonel Vavasour had never before felt as he now did, in the presence of these two girls. He was abashed ---although he knew that there was no legitimate cause for the painful sensation of embarrassment under which he was suffering. The colour flew to his face as he advanced to meet them, and with some confusion, related the circumstances of his fair burden's present situation.

A peculiar expression passed over Giulia's countenance on hearing this explanation, taking place of the look of intense astonishment with which she had observed the scene they had just interrupted. She gave a quiet, answering look to the glance of significance Nice fixed upon her; and then, for the first time, seeming to remember her sister's strange indisposition, Giulia took her cold hand, and gazing upon her face with real solicitude, desired Nice to

call for assistance. Nice had already done so, and Mrs. Rivers made her appearance.

“ We had better at once, carry her to her room,” said Colonel Vavasour, in a decided tone--for he already saw a faint tint of colour returning to the cheek and lips of the young girl.

Mrs. Rivers threw open the door of the east corridor, and Francesca was borne along, tenderly and carefully, by Colonel Vavasour, the others following.

Mrs. Gordon was just leaving her room, when this little procession met her astonished gaze. She too, had been informed of Colonel Vavasour’s intention of gratifying her young niece’s wish of beholding the armour worn, and was on the point of proceeding to witness Francesca’s delight at the sight. She was too much alarmed to ask for any explanation of the present scene, until she had seen the dear

girl placed upon her bed by Colonel Vavasour, who, after opening the window, left the room.

With a slight, convulsive sigh, her eyes unclosed, and her senses returned. Then, with eager solicitude, the aunt demanded an explanation of the unlooked for event. Colonel Vavasour had requested that he might have an interview with her in the school-room, where he anxiously awaited intelligence of his ward, and Mrs. Gordon learnt from him, that Francesca had, as he imagined, been startled by his unexpected appearance in such a guise, and he was truly distressed, as well as angry with himself, for having been the cause of giving her so great a shock.

Mrs. Gordon assured him, that at any other time this would probably not have occurred; but that of late, her young niece had appeared to suffer from unusual suscep-

tibility of nerves ; she attributed this, to the want of air and exercise, which the late rainy season had rendered obligatory, and hoped that change of scene, which she shortly intended to give her, would set all to rights.

Mrs. Gordon then returned to the dear invalid, who, having been undressed and put to bed, lay calm and tranquil, as if just awakened from a quiet sleep, apparently unconscious of what had occurred. The feeling of solicitude, however, which had for sometime troubled the aunt's anxious heart, was not lessened by this last incident ; and trivial as it might appear to others, to her it imparted a sensation of dread, which she could not shake off. It seemed as if ominous of some approaching interruption to her hitherto untroubled, placid stream of existence. But Mrs. Gordon strove to banish thoughts which might have been almost deemed superstitious, and prayed that these signs of com-

ing change in her darling charge might prove—

“ Like shadows of those clouds, that o'er the sea
Pass, and leave clear the mirror.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

“Thou sweetest thing
That e'er did fix its lightly fibred sprays
To the rude rock—ah! wouldest thou cling to me?
+ + But if thou lov'st me,
* * I will love thee again,
With true and honest heart, tho' all unmeet
To be the mate of such sweet gentleness.”

JOANNA BAILLIE.

If our readers will now proceed with us to another apartment in that corridor—Lady De Crespigny's room — they will behold a scene less tranquil than that which we have just quitted.

True it was that Nice was there seated calm and unmoved, her eyes bright and glittering, observing in silence the movements of her friend. But on Giulia's countenance there was evidence of strong agitation and excitement, as she paced the room with hurried steps. Very different truly was her outward demeanour, to that of the composed and dignified Baroness, for such was the deportment she had of late assumed.

“ Nice !” at length she cried, stopping before her friend, “ if this could be possible---if I could dare consider it anything but as a suggestion of the kind sympathy and consideration you ever feel for your friend's happiness, an anxiety which may even in this instance, blind your strong and excellent judgment, I should indeed look upon you as my saving angel—the chaser of all those dark clouds which again seem gathering to overshadow the happiness, I did for a brief space consider so secure. But is it possible, is it credible ; so

widely different in age—in spirit—in feeling ? He so excellent— so proud—so great ; she, such a child in appearance—in mind—Oh, Nice ! can you think ?—”

“ I have already told you what I think,” interrupted Nice with cold composure, “ I have only given you the result of my calm observation of many a day, and my surmises have been confirmed by the scene which we surprised in the gallery this evening ; at least with respect to one of the party. As regards the other,” she continued in a careless manner, “ I consider that there is no such impossibility or incongruity in the case. I will not, however, endeavour any longer to persuade you to believe what I say, if it so greatly please you to raise scruples in your mind against its truth. I only add, that I think it would be almost remiss in you, the natural guardian over your sister’s welfare, to allow such an opportunity to escape, of forwarding an affair, which may importantly influence, not only your

own happiness, but also that of *Francesca*."

Giulia listened to Nice's words with breathless eagerness.

"Yes," the zealous friend continued, "it was the fashion, to ridicule the severity with which old Mrs. Rivers used to regard, what was considered the bewitching playfulness and gaiety of the spoilt little beauty, when a child; and her grave forebodings of the danger of encouraging what she termed levity. It did indeed seem then out of place, for, as a child, her infantine ways were indeed very pretty, very attractive; but at sixteen, it is time, as we were only remarking this afternoon, to lay aside so light a bearing. Such innocent thoughtlessness can only now be considered, as a very pretty covering, to tendencies, which may not only bring trouble on herself but on others."

"Nice!" exclaimed Giulia, unfeignedly shocked.

"Yes," the Italian girl continued, "it is

a pity, I think, that good Mrs. Gordon still continues to encourage Francesca's childish freedom of manner; for as she is now no longer a baby, I fear any impertinent observers might look upon it, as an incipient inclination to coquetry, an absence of feminine regard to strict ideas of propriety. Even so long ago as at that ball in Portman Square, we had an opportunity of judging, what must be the probable effect of the natural laxity of manner, which, though at that time she was fourteen, her very childish appearance enabled her to assume."

Giulia covered her face with her hands and groaned.

"What then," Nice continued, "would be kinder towards her, than---effectually I trust---to nip in the bud such tendencies of character, by providing her with a husband, forming for your sister, an alliance with one whom it would be so honorable to wed---in every way desirable; particularly to a girl so young and inconsiderate as

Francesca ; a man suited in every way to guide her through life---and who after what we accidentally witnessed to day, ought to be willing to make her his wife at the very first suggestion. She is young assuredly--but believe me, she will be nothing loath ;" here Nice smiled with the sacarstic expression of a demon. " And even were she to make any objection," the girl continued, " do you not stand, I again repeat, in the place of her parents ; her aunt has at least taught her some feeling of respect and reverence towards you ; and my final advice Giulia, is, that as you value her prosperity ; and," she added in a low, mysterious tone of voice, " your peace of mind hereafter, act up to this authority---if so required."

" My mother with her dying breath, besought me never to lose sight of my sister's welfare," murmured Giulia, as if thus endeavouring to reconcile as far as possible her conscience, with these ably applied suggestions of her bosom friend—" perhaps—perhaps it is

my duty—but how am I to act—how proceed?"

When characters such as Giulia's, prone to let "*I dare not*, wait upon *I would*," are influenced, to a pitch of excitement, either by their passions, or the guidance of more resolute minds, as if conscious of their natural weakness, they eagerly seize upon this excited state of feeling, to execute the suggestions of those passions, which at the moment agitate the heart; so in the same desperate manner, as she had before acted, in ridding herself of the danger of Francesca's presence in London, she was now again prompted to grasp at the alternative, which seemed to offer at once, a final means of removing from the path of her peace and happiness, the thorn in her flesh--her Mordcaï!

Alas! had not all her jealous, torturing fancies been awakened with still greater force, by the daily sight of Francesca's increasing beauty and attractions, and the words in

Claud's letter—"She will be a lovely woman!" which were ever ringing in her ears like a funereal knell to her happiness? Had not Claud parted from the lovely child with a sigh of regret? would he not return to find her a lovely woman, and to sigh perhaps again, to think that she might have been his—instead of her less lovely sister? There was indeed but one means of averting all this wretchedness; and this was the alternative, which at the same time would ensure Francesca's welfare, and save herself from the humiliation of being despised--eclipsed by her sister's brightness, which even after her own marriage must be continually obscuring her, should Francesca remain unwedded.

Ere long Nice beheld her friend wound up to the mark, to which she had spurred her.

We will not pause to dive into the motives which impelled the Italian girl thus to act. Whether it were the intuitive love of intrigue—a secret wish to triumph over the gentle object of her dislike, Mrs. Gordon, by thus taking out of her

hands, the future destiny of her beloved charge, or the fear of that lady's presence being an obstacle to her purposed machinations -- (she knew that if both her nieces married, Mrs. Gordon would retire to Scotland) it would be but a revolting task to follow the mazy labyrinth of her designing mind, through all its plans and devices.

She saw her friend depart with well grounded confidence in her success. This conviction was not founded upon any opinion of Giulia's talents or powers of mind to execute that which she desired; on the contrary she was aware, that in this instance, her strength lay in her weakness and inability to make use of art or skill, on any subject in which her feeling were engaged. This the subtle Nice, with the extraordinary knowledge she had gained of human nature, knew would serve Giulia's purpose on the present occasion—and her conclusions were just.

Lady de Crespigny had proceeded to the

library wound up to a pitch of excitement which deprived her of almost the power of considering what she was about to do. She entered the apartment, and the tall, majestic figure of her guest confronted her at the door. He had been pacing up and down the room—a favorite occupation of those spirits most used to activity of mind and body, when reduced to comparative inaction! Colonel Vavasour paused on the entrance of his young hostess with a quick enquiring glance, in which, perhaps, was visible, a slight shade of less dignified composure than was usual to his noble countenance.

But the sight of him, alone had been sufficient, to recal Giulia to the sense of the delicate and momentous affair which had brought her to his presence—pale and trembling, she stood before him. He evidently waited in expectation of some account of Francesca.

“ How is your sister?” he said regarding her with anxiety.

Giulia's answer was so hesitating and confused, as she advanced towards the table, and sank upon a seat, that following her, Colonel Vavasour exclaimed in a tone of eager alarm—

“Lady de Crespigny—pray tell me at once—your sister is not worse I hope—we must send for advice; it should have been done before this.”

“No, Colonel Vavasour,” cried Giulia preventing him as he was hastening to the door, “my sister is better—much better—but—”

“But what, Lady de Crespigny? what is then the matter? anything in which I can be of use to you, or to—Francesca?” he added in a more subdued tone.

Giulia was weeping.

“Good Heaven, Lady de Crespigny! will you not relieve my dreadful anxiety?” he again cried impetuously, “am I not to be trusted?—your father's friend—the guardian of your sweet sister—only tell me, are those tears on her account?”

“ Alas ! Colonel Vavasour, they are ; but though I did come, with the intent to do, what I considered my duty towards my sister demanded, yet it is so delicate an office, that when it comes to the point, I—I scarcely know whether to you, who are so greatly concerned in the matter, it is consistent with my sister’s dignity, that I should reveal the discovery, that I have made.”

A deep flush passed over the gallant soldier’s face, and then left him very pale.

Her sister’s happiness---he whom it so greatly concerned---her sister’s dignity, what could all this mean ?

A moment’s pause ensued.

“ Lady de Crespigny,” at length spoke that stern commanding voice, which had so often resounded on the field of battle, and now rang imperiously through the sober, still library---“ I am a plain, blunt soldier ; and though I can make allowance for the delicacy of your sex, I am not fond of circumlocution, and idle

scruples. After having once made up your mind to inform me of what now presses on it, and hearing as I have done, that it regards the happiness of a young being whom I---in whom I---am greatly interested, I must beg---nay desire you, by the authority I hold as her guardian, to tell me truly and unreservedly, whatever it may be."

The awe-struck Giulia faltered forth---

"Colonel Vavasour, I have discovered that---that---she loves you!"

Lady de Crespigny bent her head, almost as much covered with shame and confusion, as if it were her own love she was proclaiming. But in a moment she felt her hand seized and pressed with fervour, whilst a deep voice, tremulous with strong emotion pronounced a blessing upon her.

"Bless you, bless you, Lady de Crespigny, for these words! But let me not deceive myself with what, after all, I can scarcely hope is ought but a mad delusion on my part. Did I rightly

hear---do I really understand---or did my ears and hopes deceive me?" and Colonel Vavasour seated himself by Giulia's side, and gazed earnestly in her face. "Do you really mean to say that the dear angel loves me---loves me as I love her? No that can hardly be, but loves me sufficiently, to allow me to aspire to the joy of becoming her husband---the protector for life of her happiness and welfare."

"Colonel Vavasour," murmured Giulia, but more firmly, as she felt that the first and most difficult step had been overcome, with success beyond her hopes, "I will not conceal from you, that the hope of securing such a protector as yourself, for my orphan sister, one of whom I may well be proud, and whom I would have chosen for her before every other in the world, has made me perhaps too eagerly seize the idea, (suggested by another besides myself,) that of late Francesca's alteration in health and spirits, has been created by the cause I

before mentioned. I have also been led to entertain the hope, that the knowledge I have communicated, would not be altogether unpleasing to your own feelings—still as I am only too much rejoiced to perceive that in this latter case I did not deceive myself—”

“ You think I may venture to entertain the hope!” interrupted Colonel Vavasour totally unable to await the termination of this speech. “ At least,” he continued, “ I may be allowed to ask the question, whether your sweet sister will deign to accept the hand of one, who though perhaps unworthy in himself of possessing such lovely gentleness, she will find possesses a heart that can value her love, and cherish her in a manner never before equalled by man. Only let me ask her the simple question—a word—a look from her, and I shall be satisfied! the slightest doubt on my part that her feelings revolt against the offer, and I would forfeit every hope of happiness in this world rather than allow

myself, or any other being to attempt to influence her in my favor."

" You will allow me however to prepare my sister, for your flattering intentions; in her present nervous state, perhaps—"

" Certainly, certainly, if you think it advisable," again interrupted Colonel Vavasour. " But let it be, I entreat you, Lady de Crespigny, soon. We military men," he continued with a smile, " are great people for despatch; unnecessary suspense is torture. Let it be then to-morrow if your sister is sufficiently recovered. But what does Mrs. Gordon say about it?" he continued anxiously, " is she as kindly disposed in my favor as you are Lady de Crespigny?"

" I do not think," Giulia answered with some hesitation, " that my aunt is aware---"

" Not aware?" interrupted Colonel Vavasour, his countenance falling, " that is strange. I should have imagined that she would have been the first person to discover every circumstance concerning her niece."

“ I do not know that,” said Giulia somewhat anxiously, “ she is accustomed still to look upon Francesca, so much as a child, that she is not likely to understand, or suspect such feelings as others may discern.”

“ But she is not a child,” Colonel Vavasour repeated with some impatience, more in soliloquy than in address to Giulia, as if the thought displeased him, “ at her age, many girls marry. And her mind, it may possess the purity of a child, but it is above—far above that of many who are much older. Mind speaks in her countenance—soul is in her very eye.”

“ The light, the love, the purity of grace,
The mind, the music breathing from that face,
The heart whose softness harmonized the whole,
And oh ! that eye was in itself a soul.”

Thus might Colonel Vavasour in truth have described this fair girl, for all these attributes were particularly her own.

“ May I see Mrs. Gordon ?” he then de-

manded eagerly. "Should we not at once let her share in our confidence? She claims the first right to be informed and consulted on every point concerning one, towards whom she has acted such a tender part. Till I have seen and advised with her upon the subject, I shall scarcely dare to hope."

"Not to-night!" said Giulia, shrinking from the idea; for though during this interview with Colonel Vavasour, her conscience had been so far lulled that her heart even flattered itself into the belief, that the pure, unselfish motives he ascribed to her conduct were in reality those which prompted the desire to secure her sister's fate, yet now again she was agitated. The thoughts of how her aunt might construe these motives, filled her with dread; her heart sank also at the fear of what that aunt might do, to prevent an event which she might justly deem a too premature decision of her beloved charge's destiny.

"Not to-night, if you please!" she hastily

said. " My aunt is with Francesca, and does not wish to be disturbed---but to-morrow morning, before I see my sister--"

" To-morrow then :" said Colonel Vavasour, as he wrung Giulia's hand with fervour as she rose to depart. " Oh ! may God bless you for your anxiety to promote the happiness of that angel, and for the opinion you are so flattering as to entertain of your father's friend. You command not only my gratitude, but my esteem and admiration ; may I also be able to add to these feelings, the affection of a brother ?"

Giulia, writhing at this unmerited praise, parted from Colonel Vavasour to seek her friend, to relate to her all that had passed, to listen to her advice and encouragement concerning the completion of the business. And Colonel Vavasour ! he might have been seen ere he retired to rest, to enter the gallery, and pause and gaze around him with an expression, such as might have lighted up his countenance,

on visiting some famed spot on the battle field, where for some mighty deed he had won a triumphant name of glory. He stood on the place where Francesca had knelt before him—where he had held her in his arms; he felt in imagination the pressure of that soft brow against his lips—and then he went to dream of all this joy, but more than all, to hear repeatedly sounding in his fancy, the words "*She loves you.*"

CHAPTER XIX.

“ To bid thee with another dwell,
Another!—and a braver man
Was never seen in battle’s van.

* * * * *
His years need scarce a thought employ,
I would not have thee wed a boy.

* * * * *
In silence bowed the virgin’s head ;
* * * * *
And changed her cheek from pale to red
And red to pale, as through her ears
Those winged words like arrows sped,
What could such be but maiden fears?”

THE BRIDE OF ABYDOS.

THE next morning the party assembled at breakfast, with the exception of Francesca, who though perfectly recovered from the las

evening's attack, had been desired by her aunt to remain quietly in bed till a later hour.

Mrs. Gordon left the room immediately the meal was over, and Colonel Vavasour, waiting till Nice had also retired, turned to Giulia, and pale, but composed, requested that he might have an audience with her aunt, on the subject of their last night's conference. Giulia arose, and with a tremulous voice, invited him to follow her to the school-room. There they found Mrs. Gordon, who gazed enquiringly on both their anxious countenances, which she had also remarked during breakfast.

Giulia with as much firmness and dignity as she could command, said---

“ Colonel Vavasour wishes to speak to you, and upon a subject, which, dear to her as my sister is, my aunt will, I am sure, consider in the same favorable light, in which I view it.”

Colonel Vavasour then spoke, and with manly, dignified frankness - greatly subdued by his deep, tender interest in the subject, expressed his feelings with regard to her young niece, and entreated for, at least, her countenance and approbation of the step he was about to take.

He did not touch upon the fact of Francesca's suspected preference for himself, which idea, suggested by Giulia, had alone emboldened him to embody into a hope, that which before, had been but as an improbable, though delicious dream of his fancy. His generous heart only wished to sue as an humble *aspirant* to the lovely young being; not a syllable did he utter, which might, in any way, take from her, the dignity of being the first to be wooed.

Surprise for some moments deprived Mrs. Gordon of the power of utterance; and then, when she began by degrees to believe, and understand the reality of what she heard,

there came such a rush of varying emotions to her heart, that agitation still kept her silent, till Colonel Vavasour had finished all he had to say ; and then, confusedly she answered, that she was, certainly, much astonished ; that she could not but appreciate Colonel Vavasour's flattering preference towards her niece, but he must agree with her, that as yet, she was too young to think of matrimony — and, therefore, that it would be more prudent to defer speaking to her on the subject for the present

But Colonel Vavasour now interposed. He would, indeed, have been a phlegmatic lover, had he allowed the prudent scruples of an aunt, to damp entirely those hopes, which had been so strongly raised. Again, with feeling dignity, he entreated Mrs. Gordon, at all events, to allow Francesca to have an interview with him, declaring that he only required to ascertain whether her feelings in the least degree responded to his own ; and then, if

they did not, he would withdraw instantly and for ever, his suit.

Mrs. Gordon could not, with justice, oppose this proposition; indeed, she now only wished the affair terminated as soon as possible; and when Giulia proposed going at once to prepare her sister for the scene which awaited her, and thus give her time for consideration, she did not oppose it. She shrank from taking any part in the business, and even in the perplexity of the moment, felt comfort in the conviction that her loved niece was safe in the hands of such a man as Colonel Vavasour—that he would scorn to take any advantage, which the weak, infatuated jealousy of Giulia might prompt her to pursue, in attempting to influence Francesca against her natural inclination.

Mrs. Gordon, therefore, allowed her to depart on her delicate mission, and was left alone with Colonel Vavasour, with whose evident anxiety and agitation, she could not but sympathize.

thize; she only wished Francesca was older, and that she could imagine it possible her niece might return his affection; for he was, indeed, one to whom most proudly and gladly, she would yield her darling charge; but at the present moment, it appeared to her, like matting the lion with the lamb.

They remained for some time in silence. Colonel Vavasour now pacing the room—now seating himself, hastily seizing some book, and endeavouring eagerly to peruse its contents. Giulia had not closed the door after her, and in that direction the Colonel's eyes were constantly wandering. Suddenly a sound met their ears, one long, silvery peal of laughter! It came from Francesca's apartment, only a few doors from where they sat.

The blood rushed over Colonel Vavasour's brow; he leant it upon his hand, and raised it not again. Mrs. Gordon felt for him, but could not herself forbear a smile.

Giulia had found Francesca still in bed. She

lay with her hands clasped over her dark hair, which was matted and wreathed about her head, shewing to full advantage her little face, with its small chiselled features, looking so almost infantine, that Giulia even shrank in spirit from the task she had before considered so feasible ; but there was also perceptible, a sort of dreamy languor in her large eyes, fixed upon the budding trees which gently moved without the small paned windows, probably the remains of last evening's indisposition.

“ You are better this morning, dear Francesca,” said Giulia, embracing her, and the sister’s voice was so much more tender than was her wont, that the young girl gazed on her smilingly, and gratefully as she answered,

“ Oh, yes, Giulia, dear—quite well, I think.”

“ And what was it that made you so ill last night ?”

Francesca turned her head away, as if she did not like the subject, and murmured—

“ I cannot tell you. I hardly know !” and she finished with a slight sigh.

“ You were frightened at Colonel Vavasour,” Giulia continued with a smile.

“ Was I ?” asked the young girl, and there was another sigh deeper than the last.

“ He is a very good and noble man, Francesca,” continued Giulia cautiously after a slight pause, “ how honourable – how flattering it must be to be loved by him !”

“ And whom does he love ?” asked Francesca, abruptly and quickly, as uncovering her face, she fixed her eyes sharply on her sister’s face.

“ Who ? why do you ask ?”

“ Ah ! I do not know,” she answered, again turning away, “ but I thought it was perhaps you.”

“ Me---what do you mean ?”

“ It was only because nurse said to me one day, that every one thought that Colonel Vavasour would make you a good husband. I

do not know why, I am sure," she continued, with a little pettish laugh, " except that you are clever, and learned, and I suppose they thought you worthy of him."

" No, Francesca, it is not me he loves," Giulia gravely rejoined, " it is yourself. Yes," she continued as her sister's eyes were lifted up like those of a startled gazelle, her whole face in a sudden glow, " and not only does he love you, but he wishes to make you his wife."

For one moment, Francesca remained in the sitting posture she had assumed, gazing on her sister with parted lips; then she threw herself back on the pillow, and then came that ringing peal of childish laughter, which had reached the ears of those in the school-room, and which did not please Giulia more than it had done one of that party.

" Francesca ! this is a strange way to treat a communication, which ought, in my opinion,

to have caused far deeper feelings than those of merriment and levity."

Francesca had covered her face with her hands as if to stifle her paroxysm of laughter, and Giulia gravely awaited its conclusion. At length all sound died away, her bosom heaved convulsively, her whole frame began to tremble, like an aspen leaf, and soon Giulia beheld the large tears, trickling thick and fast through her fingers.

The sister bent and kissed her brow.

"It is a surprise to you, no doubt, dearest. It was so to me—but a great happiness also, to see my little sister the wife of such a man—one by whom, the greatest, the stateliest ladies of the land would consider themselves but too fortunate, in having been selected as worthy of his choice! You will rise then, my sister, and relieve Colonel Vavasour's anxiety, which, I assure you, is excessive; grant him the interview which he so much desires, and then, he will tell you better than I can, all he feels—and you—"

“Oh, no—no!” sobbed Francesca, again sitting up, and joining her hands with a look of deep distress and alarm.

“Francesca, I have promised Colonel Vavasour that you will see him; and, therefore, I must beg that you will not childishly refuse to do so. You are not wont to suffer from bashfulness—and you have, I can assure you, already given cause for suspicion, that, in some degree, you return Colonel Vavasour’s feelings. I cannot believe, that you intend to despise the offer he is about to make you---”

“Despise! Despise!” cried Francesca, with a nervous, bitter laugh, her eyes flashing fire.

“What is it then, dear?” said Giulia, soothingly, “what do you feel on the subject?”

“Oh! I could not tell you---*you* would not understand it,” said Francesca, petulantly turning away with an impatient gesture. “Send my aunt,” she added.

“ I will, Francesca,” said Giulia, gently, for her conscience told her, that she had quenched a sister’s confidence and affection, by cold suspicions ; and, therefore, merited nothing better from her, than similar mistrust on the part of the young girl.

“ I will send her,” repeated Giulia, “ but you must promise me to see Colonel Vavasour, and not to reject his proposal without due consideration. Be assured, you would be greatly blamed by your friends, were you to act rashly in this important matter—although your aunt Gordon may, perchance, fancy you are too young.”

“ Too young, indeed !” mused Francesca, “ certainly, too young, and too little—so far below—but go, Giulia, and send my aunt, she will do me good—and I feel very miserable.”

CHAPTER XX.

ELLA. — I've fondly fixed myself upon thee,
Most worthless, and unsuited to thy worth,
Like a poor weed on some proud turret's brow,
I wave, and nod, and kiss the air around thee,
But cannot be like thee.

RODRIG.—Heaven bless thee, little flower ! I prize thee more
Than all the pride of female stateliness !

ELLA — Dost thou ? then I am happy—I am proud,
I will not wish me other than I am.

JOANNA BAILLIE.

GIULIA entered the school-room, and requested
Mrs. Gordon to go to her sister ; Colonel Va-
vasour arose, but in somewhat a desponding

manner. With as much cheerfulness as she could assume, the Baroness told him, that her sister would see him as soon as she was dressed. He asked no more, but retired to the library.

Francesca was soon weeping hysterically on her aunt's bosom, whilst her fond friend, with soothing kind words, bade her not give way to such agitation.

“ What have you to fear, dearest child ? speak to Colonel Vavasour as you would to me, he wishes but for your happiness.”

“ Aunt Gordon tell me, did not Giulia mock me, when she told me—”

“ Mock you ! no darling, it is all true, but then you need not fear that Colonel Vavasour will be offended, he is good and kind, he knows that you are very young, and—”

“ Offended !” Francesca exclaimed, “ he must not be offended.”

“ Then you will tell him the real truth,” her aunt continued.

“ Oh ! I could not---I should die before the glance of that eye,” she cried despairingly.

“ Then I am sure he will not require any sacrifice from you against which your feelings revolt---tell me all you think, and I will convey your sentiments to him.”

“ Tell *you*, aunt,” exclaimed Francesca, almost passionately, “ can you not imagine---can you not tell what they *must* be? *Tell* them ! as soon could I pourtray in words, the feelings which bent me down at his feet in the gallery last evening---the feelings which must have been too intense for my weak heart, for it seemed to crush it ; and it was this strong feeling I suppose which caused me to faint, as they say I did.”

“ No, my dear child, it was because your nerves were not in a very strong state,” said Mrs. Gordon beginning scarcely to know what to think. “ You will not feel the same, when you again see Colonel Vavasour ; and he is so calm, so gentle, and withal so kind,

he will understand at once all that you would express, and spare you the pain of long explanations. Still my Francesca must remember that she is no longer in the position of a child, but a woman, and must summon to her aid, all the dignity and proper pride which ought to belong to one ; particularly in a situation of such importance as that in which you now stand, little lady," and Mrs. Gordon smiled upon her niece. " It is one, let me tell you, of which most women would be proud, rather than dismayed. But I will send nurse," she added, as she saw Francesca more calm, but evidently confused and bewildered, scarcely comprehending what she heard ; and nurse, little knowing what was going forward, with her young lady, (who she still regarded almost in the same light as when she first took charge of the little girl years ago,) entering at that moment, Mrs. Gordon left Francesca to perform the duties of the toilette.

In about an hour's time, Francesca passed from her room along the corridor into the gallery, looked for a moment at that same spot on which Colonel Vavasour had gazed the night before, then darted off, and prepared to descend the great staircase.

It was however with a timid, lingering step. Her face too was pale as ivory, except when there flitted over it a delicate flush. But yet her feelings might not be likened to those of any other young lady in a similar position. She was proceeding of her own accord from her apartment to seek Colonel Vavasour, more like an innocent child, who with timid, confiding anxiety wishes to unburthen herself of some grief, or to confess some fault pressing painfully on her young heart—to pour forth her feelings to some one whom she trusts, though fears. Francesca paused at the library door, put her little trembling hand upon the lock ; it moved—she withdrew it, knowing however that she must have been heard : again

she collected all her courage and opened it—gave one timid glance around, then glided slowly forwards.

Colonel Vavasour arose on beholding her enter, whilst all the blood seemed to rush to his heart ; he could not even advance to meet her.

Strange influence which love will exercise over the noblest, even the sternest natures—well may the gentle sex glory in their power ! the bold, the lion hearted soldier was prostrate in strength, vanquished to feebleness, and by the mere presence of a diminutive girl of sixteen.

But when the young girl stood close before him, when he looked at the sweet face, and heard her gentle voice utter some inarticulate sound, Colonel Vavasour felt nought but a gush of the deepest tenderness, all expressed in the gaze of his noble eye.

His voice softened to the lowest murmur as he pronounced the word “ Francesca !”

And Francesca, she had remembered her aunt's injunctions. Some feeling whispered to her that it was time she should be dignified, nay even proud. She had therefore erected her little form to its full height—had even raised her eyes, as she thought, very haughtily to Colonel Vavasour's face when she first stood before him. But that look of love—her name pronounced as none before had ever spoken it! In another instant she had sunk upon the ground. She was seated at his feet, weeping and trembling like a little drooping primrose, at the foot of a sturdy oak.

Colonel Vavasour was, as it were, thunderstruck. He could not see her thus; it distressed him, and yet now he dared not presume to raise her—he could only pray, and entreat her to rise.

“Miss de Crespigny let me implore you—Francesca—do not weep—why is all this? This is not right,” he continued, using in his

despair the commanding tone he could render so imposing, “ let me *beg* of you to rise.”

It had its effect ; Francesca started up, the tears ceased, and she gazed with fear into his face—but she read no sternness there—only deep—deep anxiety.

Colonel Vavasour took her hand, and with respect led her to a chair, seated himself by her side, and with manly frankness, yet every word and tone suiting the delicacy of her with whom he had to deal, told her all relating to his own feelings, and requested her truthfully and fearlessly to reveal her own.

“ One word, dear Francesca, will be enough,” he said, as trembling and with hesitation, she moved her lips as if to speak, and then hung her head in silence.

“ One word,” he again repeated, “ to tell me whether or not you feel towards me as I could wish—say yes or no ! I will not ask more, for Francesca is truth and openness itself.”

“One word,” exclaimed Francesca with earnestness, “one word will not explain what *I* feel.”

“But it will prove, dearest Francesca, whether or not you will consent to be mine *for ever!*”

“*For ever!*” she repeated, raising her eyes with a radiant smile, but more in soliloquy than addressed to him.

“Yes, my own Francesca—*mine for ever*—my wife—my treasure—to be loved---oh! how loved!”

Francesca wept---her head now resting for support on Colonel Vavasour’s bosom.

“My darling, say you love me.”

“Love you!” she sobbed, “it is not love.”

“Not love!” Colonel Vavasour repeated, recoiling, “what then? nought but love Francesca will suffice.”

“Alas, alas! then would you have me feel as I do to all around me? I cannot help it, for I do not---cannot love you in that manner.”

“ How then, my sweet one?”

“ I will try to tell you, but you will perhaps think me wicked, you may spurn such impious love. It is a feeling, partaking of veneration, too strong for an earthly love, too like idolatry, worshipping the creature too fervently ; such a feeling it was that made me kneel to you last night, and this morning I was obliged to pray---oh ! how fervently, that your image might not come before my eyes, and steal my thoughts from God.”

It was all over now — Colonel Vavasour demanded no further testimony ; it was not for him to quarrel with such idolatry---nay, perhaps he began to feel that it could scarcely now be called by that name---since one cannot be at once the worshipper and the worshipped, and the worshipped she must now feel herself to be, in every look and tone of him to whom she had confessed her idolatry. He no longer feared the scruples of the aunt. Francesca was old enough to love him---why then not sufficiently old to become his wife ?

This was an incontrovertible argument which even Mrs. Gordon could not gainsay, especially when her little Francesca clung to her caressingly, and reproached her for not glorying in her blissful fortune. How could she but smile in the midst of the tears which would fall at the prospect of the early marriage of her darling niece ?

Colonel Vavasour set off to London to report the good use he had made of the short period he had been in office.

Surprise there might be, but no opposing sentiments could exist to such an alliance, and on hearing that the beautiful Miss de Crespigny, in her seventeenth year, was about to be married, every one agreed in her great, good fortune, in having been chosen by the noble and gallant hero, Colonel Vavasour.

CHAPTER XXI.

“ They tell me, gentle lady, that they deck thee for a bride,
That the wreath is woven for thy hair, the bridegroom by thy
side,

* * * * *

And when I think how often I have seen thee with thy mild
And lovely look, and step of air, and bearing like a child,
Oh! how mournfully, how mournfully the thought comes
o'er my brain,

When I think thou ne'er may'st be, that free and girlish thing
again.”

FITZGERALD.

IT was the beginning of July when Claud Hamilton returned to England, having obtained his dismissal somewhat earlier than he

expected. At the age of twenty-five he returned to fulfil an engagement, formed not certainly with that willing impulsive spirit of love which makes such an anticipation so delightful; but (as the fabled Midas whose touch turned all to gold) there are some happy buoyant spirits who are disposed rather to cast the reflection of their own bright feelings over every event, which in the stream of their existence meet their course, however gloomy occasionally they may appear—who in short make the best of all things. And so it was with Claud Hamilton, who returned to England ready to undertake with cheerfulness, the destiny which awaited him, and to fulfil conscientiously the duties and obligations it would entail upon him, perfectly aware that all the worldly advantages that awaited him, were not at all to be despised, or in any way displeasing possessions.

He had heard nothing but praises of his affianced bride — how munificently she had

behaved! The first use she had made of her independence was, in the most delicate and judicious manner, to assist Mr. Hamilton in a very material way with regard to financial arrangements ; and Claud, penetrated with gratitude for this act of kindness towards his family, determined that Giulia should never find him forgetful of all he owed to her--a debt impossible to repay, but by affection and attention on his part!

On Claud's arrival in London, he found that his father had already been obliged to depart for Shirley Hall, but his mother was awaiting him in Portman Square, though she was obliged to set off the following morning, to be in time to attend the wedding of Francesca, to which of course she would be accompanied by her son.

“ The wedding of Francesca !” how strange this sounded in his ears.

Great indeed had been his surprise on hearing a short time before of the intended event,

and the more he now talked it over with his mother, the more the singularity of the fact seemed to strike him.

“ What a hurried business it appears to be!” he said, “ why could they not have waited a little longer? she is so very young.”

“ Oh ! I can assure you,” replied Mrs. Hamilton, “ that Colonel Vavasour is a very ardent lover, and Giulia seemed to wish to have it over before her own marriage takes place ; in short we all think long engagements are very tiresome, useless affairs ; except they are unavoidable, as in your case. You see Annie’s and Lord Beverley’s match was soon completed, and even Gertrude’s--as it was to be, I got over as quickly as possible. I hate lovers about the house, particularly poor parsons. So I packed them off to their “ love in a parsonage,” which I assure you Gertrude contrives to make a very pretty abode. You will meet them both at Shirley ; Mr. Seymour is to perform the ceremony.”

Shirley!--at the mention of the name, Claud's thoughts flew back to past days, and he felt a strange feeling of depression at his heart.

"I wish this marriage had been over before I went there," he said, "weddings are always dismal affairs; one's own must be quite enough."

It did seem very strange to Claud Hamilton to find himself once more in that old mansion, the memory of which had always haunted his imagination, the same gloom still pervading its old walls, which summer even failed to dispel; the brightness without, perhaps only rendering the sombre stillness within more striking. But still Claud could scarcely feel that he was in the same place he had quitted six years ago. Perhaps because—

"It is our feelings give their tone
To whatsoever we gaze upon."

And certainly Claud Hamilton's feelings could not be considered the same now, as they were

then ; for though, happy those, whose hearts had suffered no greater change, still he had, since that time, *seen* the world, *felt* the world, and he even wore around him a web of that world's weaving. But there were also outward circumstances to make him feel the change, that first morning of his arrival at Shirley Hall.

Where was the fairy child, to him of old the lovely spirit of that place, and without whom it could scarcely be the same ? She was not to be seen fluttering about ; for her merry voice he listened in vain. When too, he sat down to dinner, it was in one of the large apartments prepared for the occasion, but which he remembered in former times darkened and unfurnished, echoing with no sounds but occasionally those of Francesca's laughing terror as he chased her in its gloom.

A large party was assembled in that sombre room—and more than all, there was the broken spirited girl of former days, with grave dignity doing the honours of the house ; and he

seated by her side not as then, the good natured encouraging friend, the alleviator of her neglected childhood, but in the character of her engaged suitor. And then again to think on what occasion they had assembled!

“Colonel Vavasour,” said Lady de Cressigny at the conclusion of the dinner, “do you not agree with me that my sister had better be kept quite quiet this evening. Mr. Claud Hamilton,” she added with a smile and slight erection of the head, that spoke of consciousness as she pronounced the name, “is as you know, an old friend; but still more on that account, might a meeting be agitating.”

“Perhaps so,” replied Colonel Vavasour with a very happy, proud smile, “but from the account Lady Beverley has been giving me, I think there is not much serious agitation to be apprehended.”

“No indeed,” remarked Mrs. Hamilton laughing, “except when dear good Mrs. Gordon looks pathetic and makes affecting speeches,

it would be difficult to tell which is the bride elect, Francesca or her little bridesmaids, (these were Mrs. Hamilton's two youngest girls) who try on all the pretty dresses in turn with her, and peep into the chapel from the gallery to watch the preparations."

A choaking sensation came into Claud's throat at these words, and a moisture to his eyes.

There was, however, rather a different scene to the one just described, enacted by Francesca before the end of the evening, when the excitement of the day was over and it drew near the time of retiring to rest, for the last time, in her own little room through her aunt Gordon's apartment. The colour was seen fading gradually from her cheek, the spirit from her eye, and the ladies on going up stairs, found her seated, in the midst of all her gay, bridal paraphernalia weeping bitterly.

Mrs. Gordon had left her, unable to restrain

her own strong emotion, and Mrs. Rivers stiff and stately was standing by, speaking words which sounded but harsh reproof to the little Hamiltons who sat by Francesca's side in silent dismay; but she, who knew her so well, felt they were intended to allay her feelings and to reassure her.

She was, however, more effectually roused by the entrance of comparative strangers, such as Mrs. Hamilton and her elder daughters---The gentle Annie who we now meet as Lady Beverley, a happy wife to a most devoted husband, whom she moreover ruled most thoroughly with her quiet rod of meekness, she was also mother to a lovely boy. And the pretty Gertrude was there also--the clergyman's wife, but *such* a clergyman's wife! She was attired in a toilette no less *recherché* than that of her Countess sister. It might have happened that Mr. Hamilton had not been quite judicious in her choice of the wedding trousseau, and had provided for the clergyman's bride, dresses scarcely suited to her situation; but, whatever,

might have been the case, Gertrude certainly did not form our *beau ideal* of a clergyman's wife. The fine lady seemed to cling pertinaciously to her, as she reclined listlessly on a sofa with her ornamented smelling bottle in her hand, talking of the embroidered robes, and lace caps, which she had ordered from London for her expected infant.

Her husband too, the grave, wise Seymour, who in every other respect, would not on any consideration have swerved in the slightest degree from the consistent life encumbent on one of his sacred profession, even he, gazed contentedly upon his pretty wife, and listened to all her trivial, worldly talk, with far too much of feelings savouring of carnal pride and pleasure.

Mrs. Hamilton was very much amused at this specimen of the parson's wife, which she had turned out of her school—it served Mr. Seymour right, she said, for presuming to think of one of *her* daughters. He had, however, the

promise of a living in Lady de Crespigny's gift, now held by Dr. Manvers, lately become very apoplectic, and had already been appointed Chaplain to his wife's future sister-in-law.

Thus Claud was continually reminded of the benefits his intended alliance had drawn upon almost every branch of his family. And as he sat by Giulia's side that evening, he did not forget all this; he was angry with himself for not being able to shake off a feeling of depression, which seemed to weigh down the power of appearing either ardent or cheerful, in his attentions, and which sensation the careless gaiety of those around him only served to increase. For with the exception of Giulia and Mr. Hamilton, and the latter was engaged with Colonel Vavasour on matters of business--there were none of the party sufficiently intimate with the young bride elect, to suffer much from the same feeling of interest. Claud seemed to hear nothing but the careless speeches which floated on his ear, as if he were

dreaming, of arrangements connected with the marriage of which Francesca seemed so strangely the heroine. He was quite ashamed of the feeling he experienced when the door was pushed open and Arno entered—for he started up as if he fancied the dog must be followed by his little mistress—not so much in the person of the pretty child he had last beheld at Shirley, but as the fairy Peri of Portman Square who had left an impression on his mind ever since, as—

“ One of those forms which flit by us, when we
Are young, and fix our eyes on every face ;
And oh ! the loveliness at times we see
In momentary gliding, the soft grace—
The youth, the bloom, the beauty which agree,
In many a nameless being we retrace
Whose course and home we know not, nor shall know,
Like the lost Pleiad seen no more below.”

But he saw her not that night—he saw her not till the following morning, and then how---and where ?

CHAPTER XXII.

“ Come, sweetest come !
The holy vow shall tremble on thy lip,
And at God’s blessed altar shalt thou kneel
So meek and beautiful, that men will deem
Some angel there doth pray.”

ANONYMOUS.

IT was in the ancient chapel, now decked with flowers, that Claud beheld Francesca. He had led in Giulia followed by a young and smiling party, who arranged themselves round the altar where Mr. Seymour in his clerical dress awaited them.

There was a breathless, awful pause, during which Claud's attention was only diverted once, by his eye falling accidentally on a face he had not yet seen since his arrival at Shirley.

It was that of the Italian girl; but, though he might have remarked a moment before, if he had looked at her, that she was observing, stealthily, his countenance, with a very peculiar expression, her eyes were then bent with quiet humility, on the ground.

A firm, manly tread was now heard echoing down the aisle, and Colonel Vavasour, accompanied by a brother officer, somewhat pale, but firm and dignified, passed the group, and took his place by the altar. Another pause still more breathless, but at last, Claud heard a low sound by his side—it was Giulia weeping!

The next moment a murmur met his ear, and Claud, as if through a dim haze which seemed to obscure his sight, discerned a small form led towards them, between his father and Mrs. Gordon.

A white veil streamed over her, almost entirely concealing both form and face ; her large, wild eyes, gazing fearfully and bashfully around, gleamed from beneath the transparent covering.

The trio passed close to Claud, and then there was a moment's delay—for one little arm clung tightly around that of Mrs. Gordon, who gently strove to disengage herself from the hold.

Colonel Vavasour looked with an air of entreaty upon Francesca, and then she relaxed her grasp ; Mr. Hamilton led her before the centre of the altar, and she stood by the side of her affianced husband, weeping and trembling, whilst that solemn marriage service commenced.

It was now, for the first time, that Claud began to realize the idea, that they were there gathered together, to behold that man and woman joined together in the holy bands of matrimony—nor was it till a young voice, which,

even through its weeping utterance, he could well recognise, as the never forgotten notes of his sweet playmate repeated — “I, Francesca,” and the words that followed, (to which her heart seemed to respond--from the earnest fervour by which they gradually were breathed forth) not till then did he begin to feel that in the person of that “woman,” he really beheld the sportive child of Shirley Hall—the youthful, joyous beauty of the London ball-room !

But he now seemed to understand, as if for the first time, how it all really was, and the strange sort of bewilderment passed away. In a few minutes, he was in the midst of the little crowd surrounding the bride and bridegroom, pressing forward with the others, to offer his congratulations to the young wife, now clinging to the arm of her noble, happy-looking husband.

And his words of compliment received from her more consideration, than any other of the

various kind speeches that were poured into her ear.

With her own affectionate warmth of manner, she extended her hand towards him; and with a blushing smile, seemed to welcome him as a friend and brother—and Claud, in a tone in which was blended the playful cheerfulness of former days, and the most earnest, heartfelt feelings, breathed the words---

“ God bless you, Mrs. Vavasour !”

The expression was heard by Colonel Vavasour, and there seemed something in the manner in which it was spoken, which vibrated gratefully to his heart, for, with a pleased smile, he frankly, and cordially, shook hands with the young man, and Francesca gave a little nervous laugh, at hearing herself, for the first time, called by her new title ; and then less slowly, and more with her own buoyant step, she was led from the chapel by her gallant spouse, the others following in procession.

The bride did not appear again in public, till dressed in the most unique specimen of Mrs. Hamilton's taste, she made her entrance into the great Hall, where the whole household were assembled to witness her departure.

She had taken leave of those she most loved, a fact, that could well be discerned, from the expression of her countenance. She was calm, however, but raised not her long eye-lashes sweeping her cheek; and, after curtseying slightly to those around her, she proceeded between Mr. Hamilton and Colonel Vavasour, to the door---old Hector quietly walking after them, and Arno joyfully bounding backwards and forwards before his young mistress.

Claud and some of the gentlemen followed the party into the court.

The bride had been handed, or rather lifted into the carriage, and affectionately embraced by her elder guardian, but there seemed some

little delay. The bridegroom had not followed, but stood looking in by Mr. Hamilton's side apparently discussing some point.

Claud approached to see what was the matter.

“My darling,” he heard Colonel Vavasour say, “you shall have it again, very soon.”

“But he will be so unhappy,” said a crying voice, “he has never been separated from me for a long--long month ; how he puts his little head upon my shoulder, and he looks at me so piteously. Ah! you are very cruel, Colonel Vavasour — Well, take him away — but I know I shall cry all the way.”

“Well, let it be, Francesca, if it is to make you so very unhappy,” said Colonel Vavasour, in a resigned tone, as he entered the carriage ; “you see already, Mr. Hamilton, what a victim I am.”

Mr. Hamilton laughed, and stepping back, Claud saw Francesca with Arno on her knee, the little creature pressing close to its mis-

tress in evident terror, at the fear of being removed.

But he was not suffered to remain. Francesca herself, put the dog from her, saying firmly—

“No, take it away, it shall *not* go with us,” and Claud stepped forward to receive Arno in his arms.

“Ah, Claud! Yes, you used to be very fond of him—take him to dear aunt Gordon, and tell her I send him to comfort her, till she sees her little Francesca again. I would not for the world, do what you dislike,” she added, with a sweet smile, turning to Colonel Vavasour, and placing her hand upon his.

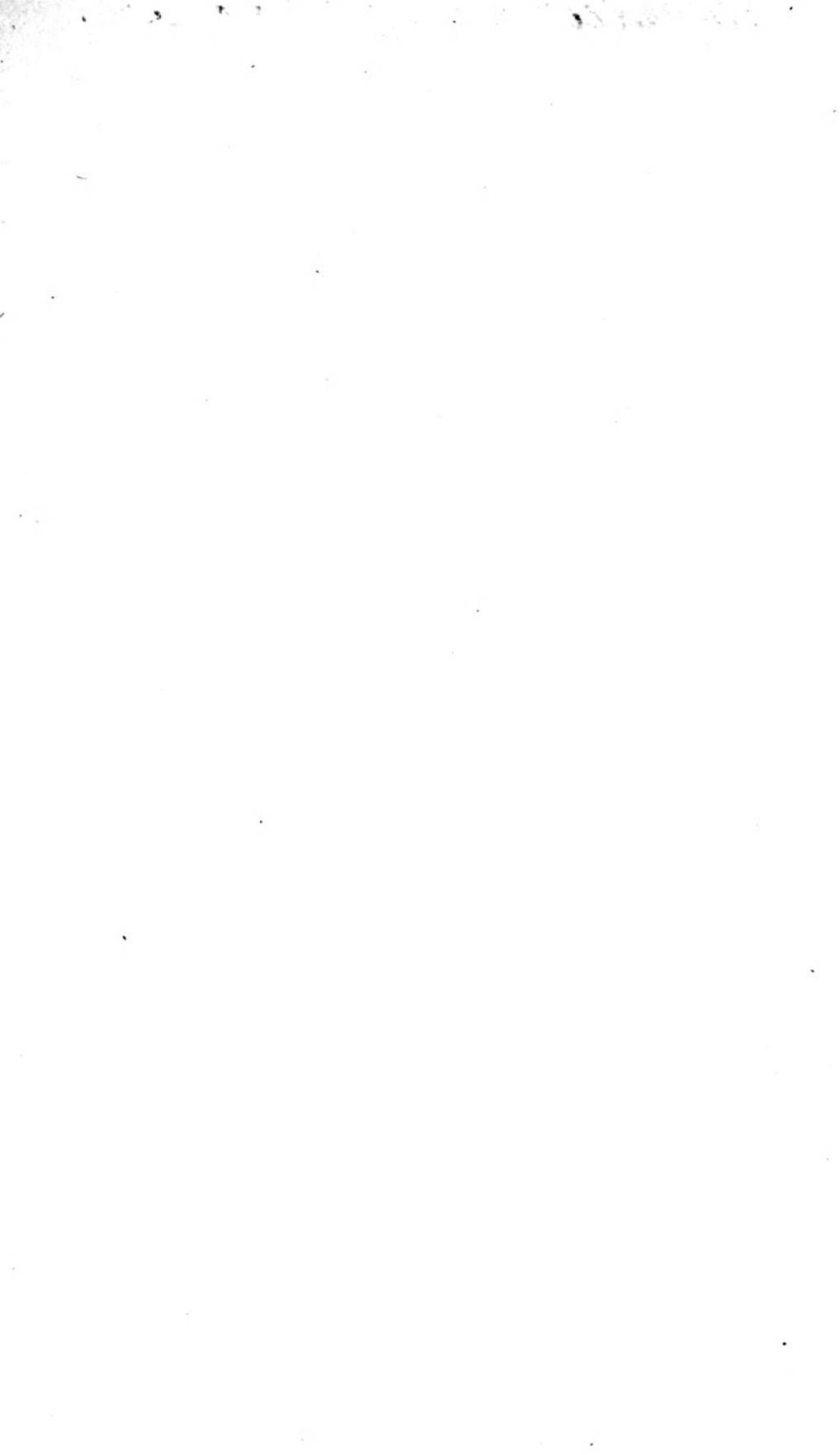
The carriage was, in another instant, grinding through the court-yard, and Claud re-entered the house with Arno in his arms.

In about two months, the papers announced the marriage of Claud Hamilton and the Baroness De Crespigny.

The event took place in London.

We will not trouble our readers with the details of a second bridal. Lady De Crespiigny was given away by her brother-in-law, Colonel Vavasour, who returned from his wedding expedition just in time for the occasion.

END OF VOL II



Edward Woodward Jackson 1811.



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